

Getting Along Just Fine

Harry had just arrived with Dumbledore, the voice of an angry woman assaulted him as he entered number twelve, Grimmauld Place. Mrs. Weasley was complaining to Remus Lupin about the twins. She had never gotten over the fact that they hadn't found 'respectable' jobs at the ministry. She ignored the fact that only one of her sons had followed in their father's footsteps and that that son was, at the present moment, persona non grata with the entire Weasley family.

"This joke shop business has absolutely no future!" Mrs. Weasley was gesturing wildly with the spoon she was using to stir stew with.

"They seem to be doing rather well with it though, Molly," said Lupin, ducking the spoon as she swung around with her retort.

"It won't last, you know! People will get bored, realize they've got better things to do with their time." She was facing Lupin, one hand on her hip the other still holding the spoon which she was now shaking at poor Remus.

Lupin however seemed no worse for wear. He hadn't sought out this confrontation or conversation, you be the judge, but he held genuine affection for Molly Weasley and was by now used to her occasional rants.

Dumbledore greeted the pair while Harry snuck quietly past the open kitchen, thankfully unnoticed, where he met a sniggering Sirius Black who knew better than to find himself in Molly's eye line when she was on a tear. Harry looked back at Mrs. Weasley and Professor Lupin and rolled his eyes at Sirius who grinned and patted him on the back, "Good to have you home, Harry."

"Hiding in your own home, Sirius?"

"Heavens, yes," answered Sirius. "I've learned better than to find myself in her company when she's like this."

Harry laughed and continued up the stairs to the room he shared with Ron last Christmas. He was so glad to have Sirius back, the few

months that he had been trapped behind the Veil were some of Harry's worst. He was the closest thing Harry ever had to a loving family; something in him broke when Sirius died.

Sirius was the first person in recent history to fall in the Veil so the ministry had launched a full investigation. While the Unspeakables had done their research Dumbledore had worked furiously to get Sirius' name cleared. He wasn't sure if the ministry's efforts would bear fruit but it would be a horrible welcome home to be thrown back into Azkaban. Dumbledore had secured Sirius' pardon a mere week before he was retrieved.

Harry opened the door to his room and found Ron and Hermione arguing about something, it took them a moment to notice him in the room. Hermione stopped in the middle of a thought to throw her arms around Harry and give him a huge hug, "Great to see you Harry!"

Ron stood to shake his hand, "How'd the muggles treat you this summer?"

Harry pulled his trunk into the room, closed the door and settled himself on its edge. "Let's just say I'm really glad to be back with you lot. So, what were you two discussing?" Harry took the diplomatic approach.

"Hermione won't let up on Sirius about Kreacher. I was just pointing out that she might give the guy a break. If it weren't for Kreacher he wouldn't have ended up in the Veil." Harry thought Ron had a fair point but knew better than to jump in on either side just yet.

"And I was simply explaining that had Sirius been nice to Kreacher all along he wouldn't have had a reason to go to Malfoy" Hermione had the lofty air of someone who knew better than you and was just trying to catch you up to speed.

"Facts are facts though, Hermione. Kreacher did go to Malfoy, Sirius was trapped in the Veil. You can hardly blame Sirius for being angry about it." Harry had listened to both points of view however when it came down to it he would usually side with Sirius.

Hermione was about to deliver her rebuttal when they heard a soft knock on the door, "It's Ginny, can I come in?"

Harry, who was closest to the door stood to open it. He pushed his trunk a little more out of the way to let her in the room. Ginny sauntered through the door, closing it behind her.

"Mum is on a tear, she's got half the house hiding out. I'm really pleased that Fred and George are doing so well but honestly I could just choke them." Ginny was rolling her eyes and shaking her head at the current state of the house.

"So how did she get started?" Harry knew must have been set off by something.

"Oh, right," said Ron. "You haven't heard, Fred and George went and got themselves engaged!"

"At the same time?" Harry knew the twins did almost everything together but this did seem to be pushing it a bit.

Ginny nodded her head and giggled. "Fred asked Angelina and George asked Alicia. Mum says they 'won't be able to support their families in the long run and that they'll be poor examples for their many children.'"

Everyone laughed at Ginny's mock of her mother.

"So what did she say when Charlie and Katinka got engaged or Bill and Fleur? They haven't chosen the usual route either." Harry was surprised that Mrs. Weasley could take such a soft line on her two oldest sons and yet come down so hard on the twins.

"Well, they were pre-Percy. I think mum can only take so many non traditional careers in her family." Ron delivered his opinion like a wise sage with deep Weasley family knowledge.

Ginny nodded, "It's definitely the pre-Percy thing. She's overlooking Bill and Charlie's careers and has set her sights on jobs in the ministry for the rest of us."

There was another soft knock on the door, not waiting for it to be answered Sirius stuck his head through the door, "Dinner's ready."

Four teenagers sprung into action, Mrs. Weasley had gotten so preoccupied with her displeasure that she was late getting supper on. The whole house was hungry and waiting on dinner with loudly growling stomachs. When they reached the dining room they noticed that there were quite a few Order members joining them for dinner. They all exchanged a look before settling themselves into their respective places, they each had a single item in mind, the extendable ears.

With so many people around the table dinner was a loud, raucous event. By the time Mrs. Weasley had magicked the dishes away to be cleaned little group conversations had formed around the table. Into this scene walked Kreacher, muttering under his breath about mudbloods and blood traitors. Before Harry had time to order Kreacher out of the dining room Sirius was on his feet, he physically lifted the elf off his feet and threw him bodily from the room, a murderous glint in his eye.

"Its long past time I enact a long standing family tradition. Your head's going on the bloody wall you little murderous wart!" Sirius had his wand raised as he continued in the direction he had thrown the elf.

Hermione was on her feet, her wand raised as well, "No, Sirius! He can't help it!"

"Maybe Hermione but I am long past caring!" Sirius was undeterred by her outrage.

"If you hurt that elf it makes you no better than someone like Malfoy!" Hermione was fairly shrieking, desperate to shock him into the realization of what he was about to do.

Sirius turned and regarded Hermione with a cold stare, "I would remind you whose house you are in Hermione."

"That would be mine," Harry's voice carried over the two fighting Gryffindors, firm and steady leaving Sirius no room for rebuke. Sirius lowered his wand and dropped his shoulders, impressed with his godson's ability to stand up to him while also being annoyed by it.

Hermione visibly relaxed but it was too soon, "Hermione, drop it." Harry's tone and facial expression told Hermione all she needed to know of his opinion on this matter. Picking fights with Sirius over Kreacher had likely led to this current encounter. Left to his own devices Sirius would have grumbled and raged but no actual harm would befall the elf. He had been pushed to this point, pushed by her.

Hermione broke into a sob, pushed past Sirius and ran up the stairs to the room she shared with Ginny. With a dramatic sigh Ginny left the dining room to console her friend, patting Sirius on the shoulder as she left.

Harry looked over his shoulder at Dumbledore who nodded, he looked back to the elf, "Kreacher I want you to go work in the kitchen at Hogwarts. You'll remain there until you hear otherwise from me." The elf snapped his fingers and was gone with a soft pop. Harry looked at his godfather once more and shrugged his shoulders, he'd only stepped in because things were getting way out of hand.

Sirius had never been more proud of Harry. He had allowed that bossy swot to get under his skin and had released his ire at the elf. Why couldn't she just let him alone about it? Nonetheless, he was the adult, he should have better control of himself. Well, at least the elf was out of the house now.

Sirius turned and went up the stairs to his room, pausing by Hermione's door. The soft sobs from Hermione and quiet consolation from Ginny tugged guiltily at his heart. He would apologize to her tomorrow. They got along fine unless the topic at hand was his family's wretched elf. He had always held the girl in genuine esteem and was sorry to be the cause of her current state.

Sirius retired to his room and hopped into his shower. He and Remus had plans to do a pub crawl and if all went accordingly he wouldn't be waking up in number twelve, Grimmauld Place.

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A/N: Well, I actually have an outline for this one. I think it will come just under 20 chapters. I love to hear what you think. I absolutely live for reviews

Draconian

Sirius crawled in just after two in the afternoon the next day, he had planned to tiptoe up the stairs for a shower and change of clothing. Molly Weasley had other ideas; she had been listening intently for the front door getting angrier with each passing minute.

“Where exactly have you been?” The tremor in her voice told Sirius exactly how she felt about his night time excursions although he couldn’t for the life of him figure out why she cared.

“Not now, Molly.” All Sirius wanted was some of his hang over remedy and a nice hot shower.

“What sort of example is this for Harry?” Her hands were on her hips, if she were a kettle surely steam would be escaping through her ears.

A sound behind them made both of their heads turn. In an instant four heads sitting in the dining room turned back around and looked as if the conversation unfolding before them was of the least bit of interest. The shaking shoulders of Ron and Harry were a dead give away as was the tutting sound emitted by Hermione.

“Later, Molly. You can have my head on a platter, later.” Sirius trudged up the stairs without so much as a glance in the older woman’s direction. He heard her hissing his name as he made his way to his room and honestly couldn’t care less. The fact that he thought she made a fair point was not to be dwelled on at the current moment. He could feel guilty later, right now he just wanted to stop the pounding in his head.

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Many hours later Sirius went in search of Hermione, it was time to swallow his pride and make that apology. He made an educated guess that paid off, finding her alone, studying in the family library.

He chose a seat opposite her and took a deep cleansing breath. "Hermione, can I speak with you for a moment."

Hermione paused, marked the place where she was reading and closed her book. She raised her head and smiled at him genuinely. "Sure, Sirius. What can I do for you."

She was still a little stung from yesterday, they argued often about the elf but he had never lashed out so harshly as he had the previous day. She knew an apology was coming, he would give his, she would give hers and they would resume their normally friendly dialog.

"I was very harsh with you yesterday and I wanted to apologize. You are probably right about the elf, I let my anger get the best of me."

"It's alright Sirius, you know I forgive you. I shouldn't push you about Kreacher. Can you forgive me?"

Sirius stood to leave, "Of course, all's forgiven?"

"All's forgiven." Hermione smiled at him sweetly pleased they had run through their little ritual. With the elf out of the house she hoped that they wouldn't argue so much.

Sirius let her return to her reading, he went in search of a snack in the kitchen. He hadn't eaten that morning or afternoon and was absolutely famished.

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Harry, Ron, Hermione and Ginny were leaning over the banister, a pair of extendable ears hanging just above the dining room door. An Order meeting was about to commence and the members were still filing past. A bedroom door opened and closed making them all jump, Ginny began hastily hoisting the ears out of the eye line of which ever passing adult made their way to the meeting. They all relaxed when they saw that it was Sirius who looked up at them and grinned.

"Better not let Molly catch you with those." He shook his head and laughed at their daring, glad to see the Marauder spirit alive and well in the next generation.

Sirius entered the dining room and chose a seat as far away from Severus Snape as he could. They sat looking daggers at each other until the meeting was underway. Molly glanced about for the children or those ears and seeing nothing she closed the door firmly, casting it Imperturbable for good measure. Albus himself was in attendance, indicating that something serious must be afoot.

"Thank you all for joining us," began Dumbledore. "We had to call this meeting in short notice, please pass along this information to our missing members."

"Has something transpired, Albus?" Remus Lupin was perturbed at the suddenness of the meeting, they hadn't even waited for all members.

"Yes, I think I will allow Kingsley to fill us in on all the details." Dumbledore found a seat as Kingsley Shacklebolt stood to speak.

"It has come to our attention that the ministry is about to go public with a new law. Voldemort has his fingers all through the ministry although I can hardly believe this managed to pass. The new law concerns itself with the marriage of muggleborn witches. It's something Malfoy is sponsoring, effective September the first all muggleborn witches of age must be married to pureblood wizards."

Molly Weasley stood in outrage, "That's ridiculous! What are they thinking?"

Kingsley continued as if he had not been rudely interrupted. "This law does not affect half-blood or pureblood witches or wizards as they may marry when they please. Any muggleborn witch of age found to be without a pureblood husband within a month of its inception will face a year in Azkaban."

There was a sound of shock that could be heard throughout the room as the Order members registered their outrage.

Remus spoke up, "It most certainly does affect half-bloods. What if a half-blood wanted to marry a muggleborn?"

Kingsley took a deep breath, "It only gets worse. This law does not concern itself with procreation; there are no clauses that require pregnancy after a certain length of time. The whole point of this law is the arrest and incarceration of muggleborn witches."

Kingsley cleared his throat, "The worst bit of this law is the required intercourse." Molly was about to stand when Kingsley held up his hand, "Let me finish a thought, please." Kingsley continued, flashing a harsh look at Molly. "They are enforcing this law by issuing charmed wedding bands, if a coupling doesn't occur at least once a week they face a month in Azkaban. The whole point is to discourage these women from opting for marriage, they want them imprisoned rather than married. Malfoy can't seem to conceive of a pureblood being willing to marry a muggleborn. The only ray of hope in this is that current marriages or engagements will be grandfathered in. Those who are engaged must be of age and must submit their intent to marry formally before the law goes into effect."

Arthur Weasley cleared his throat and received a nod from Kingsley, "We have a list of young women in need of pureblood husbands. We have a number of eligible bachelors in the order."

Sirius laughed out loud, "What? Are we going to draw names out of a hat?"

"Actually, yes," said Dumbledore.

"I meant that as a joke," said Sirius.

Remus spoke up, "Well, we can't just let them be carted off to Azkaban."

"These witches will be permitted to make their own choice, they can't be forced into a marriage if they don't want to be." Kingsley delivered the last bit of the new law and sat down. "The easiest solution would be to find them husbands. It might not be pleasant for either of them but at least it wouldn't be Azkaban."

"Not forced? What part of this isn't forced?" Arthur Weasley felt quite strongly about how desperately unfair this all was.

“Ron is of age, he should really be in this meeting,” said Dumbledore.

“But he’s not in the Order,” cried Molly.

Arthur leveled a serious look at his wife who left to hunt down her son. She returned a few minutes later with a terrified looking Ron.

Dumbledore took off his hat, he waved his wand over it, “In the hat are the names of the muggleborn witches currently in need of husbands. I think this should be done without bias or prejudice for any girl in particular...”

Molly stood and interrupted, “What about Hermione! She is one of our own!”

“I am aware of that Molly but she is not the only young woman in need of protection. Now I expect each of you who are pureblood bachelors to reach into the hat, you will most likely not know the young woman in question. I will be in touch with those Order members not currently present. Please come up and choose a name. Also, I will not tolerate any changing of names as it would be disrespectful to these women. This is a rescue mission and should be viewed as such.”

Kinglsey stood and reached into the hat and read the name of his wife to be, he gave no indication as to whether or not he was pleased with his selection. Ron came forward, after receiving a hard push from his father, he read the name and wrinkled his nose and muttered, “She’s ten years older than me, I’ve seen her at the ministry with dad.”

Remus gave Sirius a nudge who looked at his friend with reproach, “What about you?”

“Werewolf, mate.”

Sirius nodded his head, he reached Dumbledore and stuck his hand in. He didn’t look at his piece of parchment until he was sitting back down. He open the parchment and viewed it with one eye squinted

like he expected something to jump out at him. When he read the name his face became completely unreadable. Remus reached over and plucked it out of his hand. He visibly relaxed when he read the name and handed the parchment over to Molly. She read the parchment and although she cast a hard look at Sirius she was inwardly relieved.

"Hermione is safe," she said. "Sirius drew Hermione."

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A/N: Thank you for such lovely reviews! They truly made my day! Let me know what you think!

Distraught

Sirius looked up the staircase at the teenagers, he paused to let his eyes fall on Hermione. He turned, pulled on his coat and left. He had a few issues to work out at a local pub. The look he had given Hermione wasn't lost on any of them. Hermione herself didn't know quite what to make of it, was it guilt, pity? It seemed more a combination of the two and it left her feeling very unsettled.

"What was that about?" Harry looked Hermione over like he was checking for an extra head or arm.

"I don't know, weird though." Hermione gave a little involuntary shudder, something was wrong and it involved her.

The other Order members filed out more slowly, it seemed few were staying for supper, even those who normally would. Just as Sirius had done, they each turned into the hallway casting their eyes upward, letting their gaze rest on Hermione before moving toward the door. Sensing Hermione's discomfort Ginny took her by the arm and led her into their bedroom. Hermione was very quiet, seemingly staring into space but Ginny knew better. Hermione's mind was working through what she knew about the war and about herself.

"Muggleborns," murmured Hermione thoughtfully.

"Hmmm?" Ginny had heard her quite clearly but was prompting Hermione to voice her thoughts.

"There's some new law regarding muggleborns and it must be particularly horrendous for me to get those sorts of looks."

There was a soft knock on the bedroom door, Mrs. Weasley stuck her head in. "Dinner dears," just as all the others had she let her gaze fall on Hermione giving her a very pitying look.

"What's going on? I know there is something the matter and it has something to do with me." Hermione's worried eyes sought answers in the face of her surrogate mother. Mrs. Weasley had schooled her

expression blank although she suspected she had given too much away already.

“We’ll talk about it after dinner. We’ll tell you everything but let’s just get through dinner for now.” Mrs. Weasley closed the door softly as she turned to head back down the stairs.

Hermione and Ginny shared an ominous look; together they made their way silently down the stairs to the dining room. Joining them for dinner were only Remus and Tonks. When she walked into the room the two adults regarded her silently for a moment before resuming their meal. Mrs. Weasley set a steaming bowl of stew in front of her and proceeded to serve the rest. Arthur Weasley joined the make shift family a few minutes later and they shared a rather quiet meal. Ron was conspicuously absent but the atmosphere in the dining room didn’t encourage questioning his whereabouts. When dinner was over Mrs. Weasley ordered Harry and Ginny upstairs and closed the door quietly behind them. Hermione sat stock still in her chair, waiting to hear what all the fuss was about. The silence in the room was deafening, the seconds seemed to pass like hours.

Remus was the first to break the silence. “Hermione, the ministry is about to enact a law which will affect all muggleborn witches who are of age.”

Hermione nodded, her gaze never wavered from his face, the others in the room were relieved he had broken the quiet and were loath to take his place.

“The law states that muggleborn witches who are of age must marry a pureblood wizard within one month of the law’s inception or her birthday.”

The blood drained from her face straight away; there was a loud buzzing in her ears. To keep from fainting she had to grip very tightly to table in front of her, “Wh-why?”

“We believe it is an attempt at mass incarceration of muggleborns and little else. The punishment for noncompliance is a year in

Azkaban. The majority of muggleborns are witches so it is an easy way to reduce that segment of the population. There is a compliance deterrent built into the law. Those witches who found pureblood husbands are forced to have intercourse once a week thereby eliminating the possibility of sham marriages. ”

Hermione let out a long breath, “So, you’re telling me to get ready for a year in Azkaban? I think not, I’d sooner run for it or renounce magic altogether.”

“No, no one expects you to go to Azkaban.” Remus paused, “If you’re agreeable we’ve found a pureblood bachelor who has agreed to marry you. It’s not an ideal solution but it is a plan that would allow you to stay in school.”

“Who?”

“Sirius has agreed. He knows something about Azkaban and has offered to protect you.”

“Aren’t there any better options? I don’t really want to go on the run or give up magic. It’s just I’ve never...I mean to say...I haven’t, erm...oh, never mind,” her voice trailed off, uncomfortable putting words to her fears.

Molly Weasley let out a quiet sob, the barbarism of the situation overwhelmed her. This was tantamount to planning the girl’s rape in her view.

“I suppose it isn’t the first arranged marriage in the history of wizard kind, I just never saw myself set up in one. If you don’t mind, I think I’d like to spend a few days at home with my parents. I’ll go pack up, I’ll just be a few days. I’d like to speak with Sirius, Remus. Can you pass that along to him? It can wait until I return.” Remus nodded to Hermione, who turned and left for her room.

“She took that better than I expected.” Tonks was impressed with the maturity Hermione displayed, she could have screamed or cried but instead she handled it with dignity.

“She’s always been more mature than the others. I’m not sure how she’ll react when the shock wears off. I think she was wise choosing to spend time with her family, her mother will help her cope.” Remus wondered how her parents would react to such news, might they pull her from the wizarding world altogether?

Molly stood from the table, wiping the tears from her eyes, “I’ll go see if I can help her pack.”

Arthur stilled his wife’s move, “I imagine she’ll want to talk with Ginny, don’t you think?”

Instead of sitting back down she began clearing the table and cleaning up, she had to do something with herself. The others moved off to give her some space, she’d already had to repair one broken dish and none wished to find themselves in her line of fire.

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Hermione spent the next few days with her parents, she found comfort in the sheer muggleness of home. She and her mother talked through her options but in the end she allowed her daughter to make up her own mind. Her parents expressed a desire to meet her future husband, so Hermione sent along an owl to Sirius. The shock did indeed wear off and in its place was a weighty feeling of impending doom. Hermione returned to Grimmauld Place a little less than a week before September the first.

She had been worried that seeing Sirius would be awkward and uncomfortable but she needn’t have been concerned. Sirius was rarely at home these days, he returned occasionally to recover from a hangover but was gone before anyone got a chance to speak with him. Hermione felt for him but at the same time wished she could speak to him. This was a joint problem, they were in this together, she wanted to feel he was her ally. Instead she had a growing feeling of emptiness, a vast sense of being all alone in her problem.

Hermione and Ginny spent a lot of time in their bedroom talking about her upcoming nuptials and the thing that weighed the heaviest on Hermione's mind; sex.

"I've not thought a great deal about it before now, I've only ever kissed one boy." Hermione was talking about Viktor Krum in her fourth year.

"I'm rather curious about it myself. Sirius is a good looking man, it could be worse."

"Is he? I guess I never really thought about him like that. I was hoping this year maybe me and Ron would start dating. Poor Ron, I really feel for him." Hermione let her voice trail off thinking that if Sirius would show his face for more than five minutes she would have to give him a better look. "I guess I'm curious as well, what's it supposed to feel like?"

Ginny lay a conspiratorial hand on Hermione's arm and a smirk on her face, "I've heard mum and dad at it. There's a lot of groaning and grunting involved, fairly noisy event, really."

Hermione looked horrified, "Groaning and grunting? Oh Merlin, what am I getting myself into?"

Ginny laughed, "Well, mum doesn't sound like she hates it or anything."

There was a loud knock on the door before Harry and a thoroughly beaten looking Ron barged through the door. The boys eyed her nervously, seemingly unsure of what to say, only knowing they wanted time with their friend. Ginny picked a safe topic, quidditch, and they conversed happily, steering clear of any and all discussion of Hermione and Sirius or Ron and his future wife Griselda. Ron was in a terrible mood and for some reason was taking it out on Hermione.

"What exactly is your problem Ron?" He had just asked her a question about the Cannons in an oddly aggressive tone of voice.

“Well if you were a real fan you’d have known that was an excellent save.”

“I’m not a real fan Ron! You love the Cannons, remember?” Hermione wished he would deal with his feelings of frustration in a more adult manner.

“That’s your biggest problem, you know that Hermione?”

“Really? I thought my biggest problem was having to enter into a marriage I don’t want. I would think you understood that.” There, she thought, its on the table. We can deal with this as friends.

Instead of dealing with it, Ron stood and left, slamming the door behind him. Harry gave her a sympathetic look and followed after. Hermione threw herself on the bed in a fit of sobs while Ginny left the room with a murderous look in her eye. She found Ron in the sitting room with Remus and Sirius, walked right up to him and slapped him hard across the face. She left without uttering a single word, storming back up to Hermione. The occupants of the sitting room stared at each other in open mouthed shock. Ron recovered first, rubbing his cheek and casting a dark look at Sirius before leaving. Harry followed after privately thinking about the foolishness of getting on Ginny’s bad side, the red head had quite a temper.

Sirius took a deep breath and ran a hand through his hair. “Looks like I’m not the only one struggling with this.”

“I always thought something was there between Hermione and Ron, he goads her so much.” Remus considered all the lives this law affected, hoping it would be overturned sooner rather than later.

“I goad her Remus, doesn’t mean I wanted to date her.” Sirius sat back in his chair and let his head fall back to stare at the ceiling.

“They’re all too young for this sort of decision. Oh, I meant to tell you, before she left for her parents Hermione asked to speak with you.”

“That poor girl, she can’t possibly be ready for all that this entails. As fucked as the ministry surely is I never thought something like this would pass.” Sirius’ voice contained a note of bitter resignation. He had finally come to terms with what he must do although he still couldn’t bring himself to discuss it. “I’ll be sure and speak to her. I’ve not been avoiding her so much as the situation. Probably should have spoken to her days ago.”

“Have you spoken with her parents yet?”

“Fuck!”

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A/N: I really loved the reviews, I got some excellent feedback and feel like I am on a good track with this story! I know I got this chapter out pretty quickly after the other. I don't think I'll be able to do that with the next one. I'm hoping by the weekend. Please review and let me know how I'm doing!

Innocent

As usual his first guess was best and Sirius found Hermione quietly reading in the library. She heard the door open and looked up, breathing a small sigh of relief. She had been worried he might avoid her completely, she desperately wanted to talk to him.

“Hello Hermione, Remus said you wanted a word with me.” Sirius chose a seat opposite hers and gave her his full attention.

“I, um, I just, well....I thought we should talk before....well, you know when.” Hermione stuttered through her words, she wasn’t at all sure how to begin this conversation. She took a deep clearing breath, “Thank you for this. If it weren’t for you I’d be facing some really awful options.”

Sirius nodded, he felt he knew what was on her mind and didn’t know any better than she how to broach the topic. They were in unfamiliar territory with each other, territory neither had ever envisioned themselves to ever be in. “I’m happy to help Hermione. I wish you weren’t put in this situation. By the way, Dumbledore thinks the licenses will be ready shortly after the first. When they’re ready I’ll come and take you out of school.”

“Sirius,” Hermione stopped to collect her thoughts. “I want you to know I haven’t made up my mind yet. I’m still weighing my options. If we go through with this...” she started off strong but her voice began to falter as she came closer to her target. “Well, I have some questions about....”

Sirius ran a hand through his hair, “About what?”

Hermione faltered, she was red faced and uneasy, her voice was quiet and unsure. “Mum says you’ll be feeling guilty about all this. Do you feel guilty?” Now that she was looking at him she decided Ginny was right, Sirius wasn’t bad to look at.

Sirius ran through the myriad of emotions he'd been experiencing lately, he supposed guilt was on the list. "I guess so. I'm more nervous than anything."

"Nervous? I thought you had done...that."

Sirius ran a nervous hand across his jaw, this innocent creature wasn't even comfortable naming it. What right did he have to touch her in such an intimate way?

"Sirius, you have done that, right? Mrs. Weasley said..."

Sirius interrupted not caring to hear what Molly had said about him. "Yes, I have. Look, sex changes the nature of relationships. We're going to see each other in a whole new way and I'm not terribly comfortable with that."

Hermione's brow furrowed slightly, her mother had not mentioned that part although the thought had already occurred to her. She blushed when someone mentioned Viktor Krum, this was on another level altogether. "Neither am I." Hermione took a deep breath and ploughed on, "So after the ceremony..."

"Hermione, do you really want a ceremony? I mean if you want the whole day I'm happy to oblige but do you even want that?"

"There doesn't have to be one? We could do this sans ceremony?"

Sirius gave a bark of mirthless laughter, "You don't even have to be there in person to get the license, only the pureblood or his agent does."

"You mean I could be married to someone without my consent?" Hermione's voice had fallen to a whisper, the blood had drained from her face, she was trembling all over.

Sirius moved to sit beside her, he put his arm around her and pulled her close. "Not exactly, you still have to sign the license and put on

the ring. Please don't worry. Dumbledore himself will be there the morning of the first. No one but me is going to marry you, ok?"

"So, you get the license and the rings, then what?"

"Well, my family has a cottage in the Austrian alps. Its very pretty. Would you like that?"

"I've never been to Austria." Hermione hadn't even thought about location, it was thoughtful of him to take her away some place private. "I sort of thought we'd stay here. Your way is much better."

Sirius laughed a little, "Stay here? This is awkward enough without running into Order members every other step."

Hermione thought about that and giggled, she laughed at herself for thinking he would bring her back here. Of course they needed to go someplace else. "I'm fairly anxious about this, it helps me to talk about it."

"I know," he said. "So you've not made up your mind yet?"

Hermione shook her head in negation, "I've had the talk with my mum. I know how the bits are supposed to fit together. I gathered from her that there's more to it than that. Ginny said her mum sounded like she enjoyed it but the way its been described, it sounds rather uncomfortable, physically I mean."

Sirius fought the mental image of Molly Weasley in the throes of passion. "I suppose it will be at first," he began reasonably. "But as you said, there is more to it than just the bits fitting together."

"That's the part she had trouble talking with me about," Hermione searched his face for understanding. "If it were a marriage in name only, that one little clause...." Hermione sounded lost and forlorn, she felt so unprepared for all of this.

"Still thinking of making a run for it?"

“My mum has an aunt in the United States and a sister in Australia, I could go to either one of them.”

“Both good options.”

“What if it takes years to repeal, Sirius? I hate the thought of giving up my home and friends. I don’t like handing over my dignity much, either though.”

“I’m here to support you no matter what your choice is, you know that Hermione.”

“My mum wants me to stay in England if I can. She said to ask you to get it over with quickly.” Hermione had to laugh at the expression he was pulling.

Sirius was struggling with himself, he could just imagine how the meeting with her parents was going to go. “Surely those weren’t her words.”

Hermione giggled and nodded, “I mean is that a choice?”

Sirius had to laugh, “Are you asking me for options?”

“I really don’t want to give up my home.”

“ You know what? We both need to lighten up, its just sex, Hermione.”

“Well that is easy for you to say, you’ve done it before.”

Sirius shook his head, “First time is the worst, I won’t lie to you. After that, well, it gets a whole lot better.”

“I thought you said sex changes the nature of relationships, Sirius.”

“I did, its something we’ll just have to accept. Look, if you leave England you don’t know when you can come back and you don’t

know what sort of life you'll have in America or Australia. Could be wonderful and radiant but it also could not. At least here you know you have friends who will help you through."

Hermione sighed, "I guess there never really was a choice. I am glad we talked though, I'm not quite as anxious."

“Me too, the air needed a bit of clearing.”

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Hermione woke the next morning and began preparing to leave for King's Cross. It seemed to her that everything was sped up, that she was rushing headlong for a destination she would like to avoid. Before she knew it she was on the train and headed back to Hogwarts. As usual Draco Malfoy popped his head into their carriage only this time his words were for Hermione alone.

“So, Granger, you up for a little trip to Azkaban? No pureblood worth his pedigree would touch a mudblood like yourself.”

There was no warning as the Jelly Legs Jinx flew from Ron's wand, he slammed the door on Draco's fingers before pushing the older boy out of the carriage. "Prat had that coming." Ron sat back down, still sullen and continued to stare out the window.

Harry, Hermione and Ginny exchanged a look, Ron was taking the upcoming marriages very hard. The rest of the trip went by uneventfully, before she knew it she was back in the castle. She wondered if everything would speed by until the day itself only to have it all slow painfully down?

She was gratified to know she wasn't the only muggleborn girl worried about the new law. She was shocked to learn that some of her friends were facing a year in Azkaban. It wasn't as if all muggleborns were equipped with a pureblood willing to step up, in fact it seemed just the opposite were true. Hermione began feeling a little less sorry for herself and a whole lot more grateful to Sirius.

Hermione looked up from her thoughts, she was surprised to note the sorting was over and everyone had started to eat. Things were going by much, much too fast.

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Sirius relayed his conversation with Hermione to Remus who seemed rather amused by the tale.

“You actually said ‘its just sex?’ You’ve been whining about this for days, Sirius.”

“Do you know what her mother told her to tell me?”

“No but I bet you’re about to tell me.”

“She said to tell me to get it over with quickly.”

Remus tried so hard not to laugh, his face was red and there were tears at the corners of his eyes.

“Oh, stuff it Mooney.”

Remus roared in laughter, pointing at Sirius. He was laughing so hard he couldn’t breath.

“It’s really not that funny,” said a petulant looking Sirius.

Remus finally caught his breath, “Well, at least you know she’s going into it with her eyes open.”

“She is just trying to make the best of a bad situation,” said Sirius.

“So her mum had the talk with her?”

“Apparently,” said Sirius. “I’m not sure how much good it did.”

“When are the licenses supposed to be ready?” asked Remus.

“By Friday,” replied Sirius.

“So, you’ll have the weekend to sort things out.” Remus flicked his wand, two glasses and a bottle of firewhiskey appeared. He poured a glass for himself and a glass for Sirius.

“It’ll be fine, it really is just sex.” Sirius downed his firewhiskey and poured another.

Remus sipped his whiskey slowly, regarding his friend thoughtfully. "So, you're taking her to Salzburg?"

“I thought, yeah. Its pretty and out of the way. I haven’t been there in years. I’m going there tomorrow to get it ready. You want to come with?” Sirius was now on his third whiskey and was finally beginning to feel the desired effect.

“Sure, why not.”

[illegible]

A/N: Thank you for the reviews! You are so lovely to me! Please review, it makes the writing so much easier!

Class

Hermione was running late for Transfiguration. Her mind had been on her situation since school had started and as a result she was lagging in her studies and late to class almost as often as the boys. As much as she would like to have forgotten about her fate and focus on classes Draco Malfoy would have none of it. If he passed by her he made a comment about the dementors and then he started in on suggestive comments about her only alternative. Her only comfort was that at least she didn't understand about half of what he'd been saying to her. The halls were deserted, she would be arriving more than five minutes late, she was so focused on getting there that she didn't notice when Draco stepped into her path.

Hermione bumped into Draco's chest causing her to drop her books, she bent down to pick them up but he pushed her down first, making her fall.

"You should really watch where you're going, mudblood."

Hermione stopped rising to the bait with him a long time ago, she was better than him. She tried to gather her books but he kicked at them scattering them about, she made to draw her wand but he was faster.

"Less than a month, Granger," he picked her up by her robes and threw her against the wall. "Tell you what," he licked her neck starting at the base and ending just below her ear lobe. "I'll keep you out of the hands of the dementors..." She felt his breath hot on her neck. "If you admit you're nothing but a common, mudblood whore." Hermione shuddered involuntarily, shaking with fear, confused by her body's reaction to his act. She was utterly repulsed and yet the place he licked tingled.

Hermione remembered herself and brought her foot down on his, she elbowed him in the ribs and ran a few feet from him, wand at the ready. Draco tried to recover, holding his side, gasping for air, his face red with the pain. "Petrificus Totalis," she cried. Draco fell to the floor with a thud. "Accio books!" She gathered her things and ran to her class, fifteen minutes late at least. Professor McGonagall took

twenty house points from Gryffindor and gave a short lecture on the value of punctuality.

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Hermione sat quietly in the common room with Harry and Ron, not comprehending their attempts to draw her into their conversation. Ron went so far as to say he was going to see if Dumbledore would let him keep one of castle's elves, getting absolutely no reaction. Harry lay an uncertain hand on her leg, finally drawing her attention to them. "What?"

"Hermione, what's wrong? You've not been yourself since we've been back."

Hermione sighed. She would love to tell them about Draco and whine about her predicament with Sirius but she feared their reaction. They would most certainly get thrown out for what they would do to Draco and if she mentioned marriage it would darken Ron. She cast about in her mind for something to say but couldn't come up with anything convincing.

"I'm just a little distracted is all."

Ginny walked into the common room, face flush and eyes on fire. She stormed over to her friends and threw herself into a couch dramatically with a huff.

"I can't believe that foul little ferret. He was joking about asking Hermione to marry him. Said he'd take her down a peg. Can you believe that? Mr. Pureblood saying he'd marry a muggleborn."

Hermione choked out a sob and immediately shook herself quiet, angry that she had lost control.

"What has he done?" Harry's voice was soft, dangerous. His green eyes pierced hers, she relented her control for just a fleeting moment. He didn't know what had happened and knew she wouldn't tell him,

that didn't matter though, he was going to kill him. Azkaban would be worth it.

"Harry please don't," she whimpered. "I can't survive this without you and Ron, please."

Harry was shaking with fury.

"Fine, but you're not leaving our sight. I'll be damned if he gets close enough to hurt you again."

Realizing that he wasn't going to do something rash she let the sobs overtake her. Never making a single sound the tears coursed down her face as her body shook. Ginny pulled Hermione into an embrace, the girls held each other on the couch. Ginny had missed the first part of the conversation, she was smart enough to make a good guess. She made a mental note to owl Fred and George for a suggestion. Draco needed to be taught a lesson.

True to their word, someone was close to Hermione at all times. Draco hovered but never got close enough to threaten, he sated himself with leering and lewd comments from a distance. Hermione was sitting in the great hall eating her breakfast in silence, her custom of late. The post owls came flying through, an eagle owl landed gracefully in front of her, sticking its leg out so far it nearly toppled. It seemed the owl disdained to have her touch it. Hermione took the proffered post, the owl flew off before she could offer it a treat. She unrolled the parchment and blanched.

Dearest Mudblood Whore,

Your date with the dementors approaches. I graciously offer to service you as your husband. Think it over. Either way you'll be screaming and begging. Of the two, I'm the better option.

DM

Hermione was so shocked she didn't have time to react. Ron reached over and grabbed the letter out of her hands. As he read it his face

turned a delicate shade of plum. He handed the letter to Harry and stormed over to Slytherin table, not waiting for Harry's reaction. Draco wasn't prepared for Ron. The entire room watched as Ron pushed Draco's face into his cereal, wand under the other boys chin.

"Contact her again and her fiancé hears about this. They won't be able to identify the pieces when he's through with you."

"F-fiancé ?"

Dumbledore's voice boomed over the hall, the two Heads of House rushed down from their table to break up the fight. A hush descended over the hall, Professor Snape broke the boys apart. Harry ran over with the note and handed it to Professor McGonagall. Dumbledore walked calmly over, she handed him the note, there was a fire in her eyes.

"Mr. Weasley, Mr. Malfoy, please go to my office. Minerva, Severus will you escort them. Oh, and Minerva if you don't mind I would like to borrow your office."

"Of course, Headmaster." Professor McGonagall gave Professor Dumbledore a curt nod of her head and turned to Professor Snape. "Shall we, gentlemen?"

Professor Dumbledore turned to Harry, "If you would be so kind as to collect Miss Granger, Harry. Take her to Professor McGonagall's private office, the password is excellence."

Harry nodded to Professor Dumbledore and returned to the Gryffindor table. He spoke quietly to a still mortified Hermione. Red faced and unable to lift her eyes to the room Hermione allowed herself to be led through the silence in the great hall. Harry had a look in his eyes that dared the student body to utter a single word. Most of the older students had already averted their eyes, only the younger ones watched with their mouths agape and eyes wide. Harry and Hermione walked to Professor McGonagall's office where they waited for the others.

“It’s going to be alright, Hermione. Dumbledore has the note from Malfoy.” They both sat on the edge of Professor McGonagall’s desk, eyes on the door.

“Have you heard about all the girls that are going to Azkaban on the first of October?”

“Yeah, I have.”

“I just can’t believe it’s real. It’s really real. I’ve been feeling so sorry for myself, I didn’t think about those who had it worse than me.”

“I’m really glad Sirius is able to help you. I don’t like to think about you in Azkaban.”

“I feel really grateful for him and sorry for him.”

“I don’t feel sorry for him.”

“What? Why not?”

“He gets a beautiful, young wife Hermione. Don’t feel sorry for him.”

“He’s forced into this Harry, just like me. Besides I’m just a bossy know-it-all, little miss bookworm.”

“Sirius would have to be blind not to see how special you are.”

Hermione wasn’t able to respond because the door to Professor McGonagall’s office opened. They both jumped guiltily off of the desk. It was only Ron coming through the door and they let out a sigh of relief, neither wanted to be caught with their bottoms on the professor’s desk. Ron wore a smug grin until he met Hermione’s eyes, he immediately dropped it in exchange for a look of concern.

“What happened?” Harry was the first to speak.

Ron glanced at Hermione, he didn't want to appear too pleased. They all preferred that none of this had ever happened.

"Well, I got a week of detentions with Professor Snape."

He heard a sharp intake of breath from Hermione.

"Don't, Hermione. Don't think a thing about it. It was worth after what he's done to you."

"Thank you, Ron," she sniffed and looked like she might be about to cry again. Ron wrapped an arm around her, pulling her close before releasing her again.

"Wait until you hear what Malfoy got. He has a months worth of detentions with McGonagall."

Harry let out a low whistle.

"That's not the best part though. Dumbledore is writing to Sirius, Malfoy has to make an apology to the both of you."

Hermione's eyes went wide and Harry doubled over with laughter.

"I wish I could be a fly on the wall for that," cried Harry.

Hermione let out a soft giggle and playfully slapped Harry on the arm.

The door to McGonagall's office opened once more and in strode Professor's Dumbledore and McGonagall. Professor McGonagall walked up to Hermione and gently cupped her face with one hand.

"I'm very sorry about this, Miss Granger."

Hermione held her Head of House in such high esteem, she felt her emotions threatening to overtake her once again. Before she was completely overcome Professor McGonagall took her hand away and walked around to stand behind her desk.

“I assume Mr. Weasley has filled you in on the pertinent details?”

Harry and Hermione nodded. Harry heard Professor Dumbledore walk up behind them and clear his throat.

“Miss Granger if Mr. Malfoy continues to pursue you in such a vulgar manner I insist you report it to Professor McGonagall immediately. One more such incident and he will be removed from the school.”

“Yes, sir.”

Professor McGonagall asked them if they had anything to add, Hermione gave her friends a sharp look and shook her head. The boys stared at her in wonder but kept their mouths shut. Ron managed to keep quiet until they were out in the hall.

“Why didn’t you tell them what happened the other day?”

“I want that apology.”

The boys looked at each other and grinned.

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Two wizards stood in front of a cottage that was nestled in a little valley surrounded by towering mountains covered in white. The brook that ran directly behind the cottage babbled gaily, the air was crisp and clean. The valley’s low rising hills and straight fields were covered in lush green grass that was dotted with the white fluffy forms of grazing sheep. The cottage was one of five and the wizards waited as the caretaker’s wife waved her wand and lowered the charms from the cottage.

“Why is it warded?”

“It’s not Moony, they charm the place so it stays pristine for my family. We hardly ever came here but always demanded it be ready at a moments notice.”

Sirius spoke quietly in German before the older woman walked away.

“She’s going to stock it with food. Let’s have a look, shall we?”

“Exactly why did you have to come here in person? Couldn’t you have just sent an owl?”

“My German is shite, Moony. I can barely speak it, if I tried to write I’d probably instruct her to vanish it altogether.”

Remus laughed as they walked through the door to the cottage to have a look around. The cottage was open and spacious with two floors. The living area had several sumptuous couches and chairs situated around a large fireplace. A large bear skin rug that snarled quietly if tread on lay just in front of the hearth. Sirius walked over to the rug and Silenced it. The bear’s eyes followed Sirius as he walked off toward the stairs.

“I never understood why father wanted to hear that poor beast.”

Remus looked up from his position in the little dining area which was just off the kitchen. He was admiring the hand painted chairs which had a decidedly Bavarian influence. He smiled at the grimace on his friends face and followed him up the stairs.

The bedroom was quite spacious, it opened into an overlook on the living room below and to its rear was a large balcony overlooking the brook. The tables and chest of drawers were all painted in Bavarian designs, similar to the chairs below. Remus entered the bathroom where he found a huge claw footed old fashioned bathtub. He looked back at his friend, who happened to be looking away, and smiled.

“Well, it’s the same old place and everything seems to be in order. This was always our cottage; me and Regulus.”

Sirius walked down the stairs headed for the entrance when he heard a pecking sound, he looked over to the kitchen window and saw a large barn owl. He opened the door and took the parchment from its

leg and apologized for not having a treat. The owl huffily shook its feathers and flew back out the open window. Remus walked over to his friend when he noticed the muscle jump in Sirius' jaw.

“What is it, Padfoot?”

Sirius handed him the letter as an answer, Remus read it and looked nervously at his friend.

“Padfoot, please don’t do anything rash. Voldemort has his hand in everything. Getting yourself killed or imprisoned will be of no help to Hermione.”

Sirius stood still for a moment, he took in a deep breath and let it slowly out. He nodded his head, his friend was right. Dumbledore had handled the problem well, although it may still raise the ire of Malfoy's family. Apologizing to a muggleborn was unheard of these days and was a brave move for the old man.

“We’d better get going”

Remus nodded and followed his friend out the door. They stopped by the caretaker's home before Apparating away.

[illegible]

Apology

The next morning Sirius Apparated to Hogsmead, he walked up to the gates where he met Professor McGonagall. Together they walked back to the castle. Professor McGonagall filled Sirius in on what had happened. He was furious with Draco Malfoy but was resolved to hold his temper in check, a very difficult thing for him to do. He waited outside the great hall while Professor McGonagall retrieved Hermione.

Sirius had to chuckle at the look of smug satisfaction on Hermione's face. How very full of surprises she was. That there was more to her than met the eye he knew. He knew that from personal experience having been rescued by her when she was all of thirteen. Beyond that though his experience with her was limited to her time spent at Grimmauld Place. The interaction between Harry, Ron and Hermione had served as mild entertainment for him when he was forced into hiding. She had come across as brave, loyal and innocent of darker human emotion. Now he found himself with a front row seat to a view of her more vindictive side, it surprised and pleased him. He caught her eye and smirked at her, letting her know he knew she was looking forward to this. Hermione averted her eyes and blushed. Sirius chuckled, he caught her hand and gave it a squeeze, letting her know he was not disapproving of her. She snuck a look at him and grinned mischievously, pleased that he 'got' her.

The three of them walked to the stone gargoyles and up the spiral staircase. Hearing raised voices from inside they paused outside Professor Dumbledore's office door.

"I should disown you for offering to marry a muggleborn!" Lucius Malfoy was hissing to keep from shouting.

"I was just baiting her," grumbled a petulant Draco Malfoy.

"I rather think it is the manner of his asking that is of issue today, Lucius." Hermione heard a hint of steel not often found in Professor Dumbledore's tone.

"If you say so," sneered Lucius.

Professor McGonagall tapped on the door and entered.

Professor Dumbledore smiled kindly at Hermione and Sirius. Professor Snape was also in the room. Dumbledore handed the letter to Sirius giving him a moment to read it. Sirius scowled at Draco, Hermione thought she must be hearing things. For a moment she thought she heard Sirius growl.

“Ah, now we can begin,” said Dumbledore. “Draco, you have something to say to Miss Granger?”

Draco said something unintelligible under his breath.

“Speak up boy,” commanded Sirius, revolted by what he read in Draco’s letter.

Draco looked up at Hermione to see her smiling sweetly but the glint in her eye was not lost on him, he seethed inwardly, vowing silently to get her back for this.

“I apologize.”

“For what?” Barked Sirius, he wanted to hear specifics.

Lucius narrowed his eyes at Sirius, it was humiliating enough to witness his son apologize to the mudblood. Lucius’ mind began to consider his method of retribution, pride was a very great virtue in his eyes . It was suffering a very great wound.

“I apologize for writing you that letter.”

Professor Snape stood forward, “I think that covers it. Draco go wait in the common room.”

Sirius stepped forward, closing the distance between himself and Draco, blocking his path. “That does not cover it! I want to hear you say you’re sorry for taunting her about the dementors and that pathetic innuendo,” he demanded.

Draco looked to his Head of House but in the presence of Dumbledore he got no support from Snape. Draco glared at Hermione, he opened his mouth and was about to speak but Sirius cut him off.

“Wipe that look off your face,” snarled Sirius.

Draco was genuinely intimidated by Sirius who was bigger, older and known to be magically powerful. Draco could feel the animosity coming off the wizard in waves. Sirius was still in close proximity to Draco and it was too much for him, Draco stepped back. He flicked his eyes at Hermione and cast a glance at Sirius who was still glowering. Swallowing every ounce of pride he ever had Draco made his apology for no other reason than a fear of Sirius.

“I apologize for the dementor comment and for the other bit.” Draco glanced at Sirius for his reaction.

The only acknowledgement Sirius gave Draco was to drop the overt aggression, replacing it with arrogant disinterest.

Snape gave Draco a significant look and inclined his head towards the door, silently dismissing him.

“Don’t forget Mr. Malfoy, detention for the next month, starting this evening,” said Professor McGonagall.

“Wait,” said Sirius, putting his arm out to point at Draco. “I don’t want you coming within a foot of my fiancé.”

Draco nodded and nearly fled Dumbledore’s office.

In Hermione’s mind this was ten times better than the ferret incident, she had never witness such a humiliation of Draco that didn’t require a wand. She could have kissed Sirius. Instead she squeezed his hand and gave him a grateful, satisfied smile. Sirius looked smug, feeling very much the hero in this story.

“Been in love long?” After that display Lucius couldn’t resist digging at Sirius a little.

“My family has a history of arranged marriages, as does yours. In fact I believe that is how you acquired my dear cousin.” Sirius had hoped he would get an opportunity to antagonize Lucius.

“Never compare her to my wife!”

Hermione jumped but Sirius just laughed at the man, he pulled her tightly to him to calm and steady her. Lucius made it far too easy, it almost wasn’t fun. Almost. Sirius cast a playful, appraising look at Hermione, “I agree, Cissy doesn’t quite measure up, does she?”

“Gentlemen!” Dumbledore’s voice alerted them to where they were. Lucius stormed out of Dumbledore’s office followed closely by Professor Snape.

Hermione had to hide her mouth with her hand to cover the pleased grin. “Thank you, Sirius.”

Sirius gave her a conspiratorial smile, pleased that they had shared in something. He gave her shoulder a tight squeeze, “Minerva would you mind walking Hermione back to her common room. I don’t want that little shit to...”

“Ahem.” Dumbledore cleared his throat significantly.

Sirius just grinned, not really all that sorry. “Oh, right. Sorry about that.” He was certain he heard Hermione giggle as she left with Minerva.

Dumbledore waited until the room was clear to speak, “We’re having trouble getting your marriage license approved. To be more specific, all muggleborn witches are.”

“Trouble? On what grounds? I thought you said you could fast track it through. ”

“Well, her age has come into question.”

“But she is of age,” said Sirius.

“Then her status as a student. We were able to counter that one by asking if she could delay her sentence until she graduated.”

“I’m guessing they didn’t go for that.”

“They ‘accidently’ ruled you unfit because of your prior conviction. I think you’ll have to deal with this in person.”

Sirius laughed, “My incarceration, that’s rich. Yeah, I’ll go now. Thanks for the heads up. I’ll stop by Grimmauld and pick up a few important documents. I think my unlawful incarceration might come in handy.”

“The famous Sirius Black, as it were?”

“Something like that, yeah.”

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Rita Skeeter looked up from her desk to see her favorite bad boy lounging in the doorway to her office. Sirius made good copy; sexy, wealthy, with a whiff of danger and bad intentions. Rita flashed him a wide, predatory smile. “Hello, handsome.” She raised an eyebrow at him in question. He was always good for an interview but he had never come looking for her before.

Sirius flashed his trademark sexy smirk, like old lovers they were. “I was hoping you could help me Rita. I need to put in a wedding announcement and don’t know who to talk to.”

His words had the desired effect. Rita waved him into her office, her Quick-Quotes Quill at the ready. “Don’t be a tease, Sirius. You haven’t any practice.”

Sirius chuckled at her allusion to his personal life. "Its true, I'm settling down with a lovely young lady."

Rita was practically drooling, this story was good for the cover. "I see, just how young is she?"

He knew his next words would hook her, he'd have himself an accomplice. "Seventeen."

"Lovely." How she adored this man.

"I'm having a bit of trouble getting the license."

"Really? Why? She's of age."

"Not sure, really. She's a muggleborn so we have to get our license through the Office for the Control of Unmarried Muggleborns. They're being a bit unhelpful."

Even better.

She'd had a great deal of trouble getting any information about this new department. She could kill two birds with one stone. Rita flashed Sirius another wide smile giving him a perfect view of her gold teeth. Rita was no fool. His last statement had given him away. The threat of a story that would cast the new office in a bad light might make them a bit more cooperative. Sirius was a favorite of the paper, a story about him or with him in it always boosted sales. If the general public learned of the heart throb's difficulties with the new office the negative publicity could be staggering, even if he was being taken off the market.

"I see. A little quid pro quo?"

"Something like that, yeah."

"And, if they are suddenly obliging to your cause, what of me and my story."

Sirius grinned at Rita, she didn't miss much. "My bride and I will give you an exclusive."

"Lovely."

Even without Rita tagging along Sirius felt his chances were better than average. After all, he thought, it's a Friday, half the staff took off early. It might work in his favor.

Unfortunately they were ready for him. Rita made them rather nervous however with her pen scribbling furiously away on the parchment which was charmed to float along beside her. She mused out loud and loudly of all the possible juicy, disparaging headlines for her story. Sirius was politely shuffled to one office after another, every ministry worker seemed only too happy to help and yet were singularly unhelpful. He hit one dead after another. When he was sent back to the original office he started with he was at his breaking point. Rita nearly squealed like a little girl when he went to the Office for Magical Law Enforcement and proceeded to file a case against the ministry for his incarceration. Sirius thought surely Rita's pen would pass out from exhaustion any minute. When they saw he was deadly serious someone from the newly formed Office for the Control of Unmarried Muggleborns led him away. He handed in his official intent to marry, the clerk handed it back.

"Is this girl of age? She is a student is she not?"

He pushed it back at the clerk. "She is in her seventh year, so yes, she is of age. See here on this line," he pointed to the form, "it gives her date of birth. She is seventeen and oh, look at that, she turns eighteen in just under a month."

"Very poor observational skills on the part of the staff, not off to a great start are they Sirius?" Rita sounded gleeful.

A thin bead of sweat was forming along the brow of the clerk. "We can't grant a marriage to a student."

“Well, firstly I’d like to see that section in the law and second how exactly do you expect her to complete her education from a cell in Azkaban.”

“Staff unfamiliar with the statutes of the laws that govern their office. Lovely.” Rita continued to muse allowed. This was getting better by the minute.

“You are aware of the stipulation that the two of you are required to copulate weekly.”

At this Rita cackled, her eyes gleaming. It was just too good!

“I like them young,” said Sirius with a leer at the clerk and a wink for Rita.

Flustered but determined the clerk continued on. “You were recently recovered from the Veil, were you not? I seem to remember reading about it in the Prophet. I am not sure you could be considered a living being having been dead once. Have you been officially declared as living?”

“Staff not up to date on current ministry rulings.” Rita was going to have one hell of a scathing article on the Office for the Control of Unmarried Muggleborns.

Sirius laughed out loud, this was getting ludicrous. He withdrew his papers that proclaimed him a member of the wizarding world once again.

“Can you prove you are not a fugitive from justice, Mr. Black?”

Rita peered over her garish glasses at the clerk, the look on her face was incredulous. “Sirius’ pardon was only the biggest news at that time. Of course that was two years ago, do you even read the paper, better yet do you read at all?”

Sirius withdrew his official pardon and slammed it down on the desk.

Rita cooed phrases like, “righteous indignation” and “brave determination in the face of overwhelming stupidity.”

“Yes, and if I don’t get that license I’ll be taking the ministry on. I’ll expose what you did to me, incarceration without a trial and proved innocent to boot. They’ll be clamoring for the resignations of half the office Heads by the time I’m through with you people.”

The clerk finally relented. Sirius noted that he and Hermione were the first couple entered into the official registry. The ministry hadn’t approved any other marriage. For the first time it hit him that they would take her to Azkaban if they could. It also dawned on him that there would be some unhappy ministry officials over this. The clerk handed him his marriage license and the charmed wedding bands.

“Let me see your name tag, dear. Lovely.”

Rita and Sirius walked out of the office together. Rita wore a rather smug, satisfied smile. She just adored this man, he made writing such a pleasure. Sirius’ expression however was grim, his little experience with the new office did not bode well. As they parted to go in their separate directions Rita couldn’t help but solicit a follow up interview. He had fulfilled his part of the bargain, she had a phenomenal story on her hands. Her problem was that he had dangled a carrot and she dearly wanted a bite.

“You be thinking about that exclusive with you and your wife. You have my guarantee it will be the most flattering story I’ve ever written.”

Sirius just flashed her that smile that made women swoon on the spot. He waved to her as he turned in the opposite direction. On his way out he decided to pack a bag and leave with Hermione immediately. Before Apparating to Grimmauld Place he flicked his wand, sending a patronus to Dumbledore asking him to tell Hermione to get ready to go.

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Hermione was telling the story about how her meeting in Dumbledore's office went. She was a little shaken by Lucius Malfoy's attitude. The look on his face could only be described as murderous. She felt an unfamiliar thrill when Sirius had bullied Draco but Lucius Malfoy was another matter. She almost wished he had left the other pureblood alone. She didn't want someone like Lucius Malfoy making her life anymore difficult or uncomfortable than it already was.

"I wish I could have heard Sirius speak to Malfoy like that. Classic that is!" Said Ron, glad of any misfortune delivered to the man responsible for his upcoming life changing event, or his son. "Wipe that look off your face." Ron got a dreamy look on his face.

No one had mentioned a single word to Ron about his future wife, Griselda Woloshin. Ron had only seen her once and that had been from the back. It had been a few years ago and he really hadn't paid that much attention. He was wishing now that he had. He was a teenage boy so privately the thought of sex was titillating, he just hoped Griselda wasn't a hag.

The portrait hole opened up and Professor McGonagall stepped though, she scanned the room for Hermione and motioned her over. They spoke quietly for a moment after which the Head of House left the way she came. Hermione walked back over to her friends, looking nervous. She began to gather her books. "It's time," she said quietly, a tremor in her voice. She looked at her friends for a moment. Harry gave her a soft smile of sympathetic encouragement. Ron refused to meet her eyes. Ginny got up and walked the Head Girl back to her private dormitory.

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Sirius was in his room room throwing clothes hurriedly into a bag, Remus sat in the only chair in the room watching his friend.

"I'm just flabbergasted at how earnest they are at keeping these women from the marriages they profess to want them in."

Sirius sighed and ran a hand through his hair. "Yeah, well as nervous as I am about all this I really want to get her to Salzburg, get the rings on our fingers and get it over with. The sooner we've consummated the damn thing the harder it will be for them to annul it and cart her off."

A little grin was threatening Remus' face. He was fighting it as hard as he could. Sirius Black nervous about sex, this had to be a first. "You know its going to be fine. I'm sure it'll be awkward at first but as often as you'll be shagging it will work itself out into something more comfortable."

"This whole thing, it's surreal." Sirius flicked his wand at his bag, closing it, "Well that about covers it, I'm off Remus. I'll see you in a few days."

"You know it could be worse Padfoot, she is a very pretty young woman."

"I guess I never bothered to notice before."

"Well then look at her, really look at her Padfoot. She has become quite attractive. She's not a child anymore."

"I know she's not. I've just never had to consider her as an adult."

Remus walked his friend to the fireplace where Sirius floo'd to Dumbledore's office. Sirius dusted his feet off before entering the Headmasters office. Hermione hadn't arrived yet. Sirius took the opportunity to fill Dumbledore in on his experience at the ministry. "The ministry is fighting tooth and nail to keep these marriages off the books. They gave me quite the runaround. Hermione and I were the first to make it through. In the end I had to threaten to file that case against them."

"I feared as much, well we still have some pull at the ministry. It is time to start calling in some favors."

"They will be getting a spot of bad publicity from dear Rita."

Dumbledore's head shot up, he looked alarmed. "What do you mean, Sirius?"

Just then there was a soft knock at the door. The two men broke off their conversation. It would have to wait for another time.

Dumbledore called Hermione in, she smiled nervously. She greeted the two men and then didn't know what to do or say so she just stood there, fidgeting. Sirius grinned at her. "You had a little too much fun this morning." She had to cover her mouth again, ashamed to show such pleasure in front of Professor Dumbledore. His words had the desired effect. He had put her at ease. She was no longer stressing over the long evening that loomed but instead had visions of Draco dancing in her head.

They were flooing directly to her parent's home before going to the cottage. Hermione gave him the address. She took one look back at her Headmaster before she disappeared in a whirl of green flames. Sirius followed directly after, just as nervous and apprehensive although for very different reasons.

[illegible]

A/N: You've been so kind to me with your review so, Thank You!

I forgot to answer questions from the reviews last chapter. I apologize. It was an oversight. I spent a glorious two weeks in Austria when I was a child. It made a lasting impression. Hermione has had her eyes on Ron and never really looked at Sirius romantically. Sirius didn't harbor any feelings for her either. They have to start at the beginning. I've covered some early impressions, more to come.

Malfoy bonfire! That was awesome! Made me laugh! I'd like to see that, too!

I promise I am working on Sacrifice. I should have something up soon, maybe within the next two weeks.

You are so very wonderful with your reviews. The that chapter is almost written although I've redone it a dozen times, hopefully I'll get it posted in the next few days. Don't anyone hold your breath though. I can't be held responsible!

Please review!

Just Sex

NC17

Sirius was having an extremely long day and it was just getting longer. The talk with her parents was not going well, not horrible, but not well. Hermione's parents were not in acquaintance with any adult wizards, they rarely saw Hermione in anything but muggle clothing. Their daughter was in her Hogwarts uniform with which they were familiar but Sirius was far in a way out of their realm of understanding. When Sirius left the ministry to pack and then retrieve Hermione he was in such a hurry he hadn't thought to change his clothes. The culture shock was, to say the least, stunning.

Sirius sat on the little sofa doing his best not sprawl out lazily as was his custom. It had been years since he had been in polite company. He was a little out of practice. Sirius' hair was long and he continuously tried to push it out of his eyes. He wore his well tailored midnight purple robes open, the black silk shirt underneath had three buttons from the top undone. You could clearly see the tattoos from Azkaban. The buckle on his belt was small, jewel encrusted and glittered ostentatiously. He wore his black leather pants painfully tight, his dragon hide boots matched his robes. This was not the man you wanted to send off with your virgin daughter. He fidgeted nervously next to Hermione who was already nervous herself, posture perfect and stiff. The comparison served to make Sirius stand out even more than he already did.

The Grangers were trying their hardest to make polite conversation but the only common ground any of them had was the upcoming marriage. Hermione thought there would be no coming back from Sirius' answer to her father about his work. When asked where he worked Sirius had replied, "Oh, I don't. Not if I can help it anyway."

Sirius was so nervous he hadn't even thought the question through. He gave the first answer that came to mind. Hermione had done her best to cover for him, explaining that he was independently wealthy and that he devoted his time to serving wizard kind. It was a stretch and her parents knew it. The bottom line was that she was going to marry this man to keep her hold on the world she now belonged to.

Before things could get any worse Hermione decided it was time to leave. She knew Sirius hadn't meant to be flippant or disrespectful, that he was just nervous and out of his element. She had given her parents the courtesy of meeting her husband to be. Hermione hugged her parents goodbye, Sirius shook her father's hand. She led him to the back of the house and out into the yard. She looked at him, letting him know it was time for him to take the lead. He pulled her close and Apparated them away.

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He landed them on the path that led to the cottage. If she weren't so upset she would have been charmed by the view of the mountains and fields and the sounds floating up from the brook. Sirius explained that the cottages were a few miles outside of Salzburg and that he would take her shopping tomorrow if she wanted. Hermione didn't say anything. She was still irritated about the conversation at her parent's house. They walked up the path to the door. Sirius flicked his wand to open it and led Hermione inside. While Sirius deposited their bags upstairs in the bedroom Hermione walked around the little cottage examining everything. Now that they were here she could feel her anxiety mounting, she couldn't help but vent a little. Sirius returned to the first floor ill prepared for her ire.

"Not if I can help it?" Her tone was aggressive and accusative.

"What? Oh, that. Well..." He said his voice rising a little higher than normal. "I was nervous."

"I spent days convincing them that you were respectable only to have you..." Her voice was on the rise and she had started gesturing.

"Look, I'm sorry, ok?" He said defensively with a touch of agitation.

"My father nearly made me give up magic! They are scared stiff of me going to a prison guarded by monsters!"

"Hermione..."

“What they must think of you, and of me for leaving with you. You’re dressed like some sort of...of...playboy!”

Sirius chuckled at this last comment. “Playboy, huh? What exactly do you think Molly meant by that Hermione?” In the space of just a few minutes Sirius understood why Ron worked her up so much. Her emotion highlighted the fact that she was a very beautiful young woman. Remus’ words came back to him, his friend had been right.

His words had the desired effect. The direction of the conversation turned in his favor as he had her off balance now. Hermione blushed at the thought of stating what she thought a playboy was.

“Oh, come now,” he purred, his tone light and playful. “Just what did she say about me?”

Hermione giggled and shook her head, she just couldn’t. Mrs. Weasley had overheard a piece of gossip about Sirius on a shopping trip to Diagon Alley. She had lectured Ginny and Hermione on the evils of a certain type of man. Sirius was at the top of Mrs. Weasley’s list.

“No?” He playfully circled around her, like she was prey. He continued teasing her for the naughty information. “Cat got your tongue?”

Hermione grinned at him, thoroughly chastised.

“Why did everything happen so fast? I barely had time to pack.” She wanted to steer the conversation to calmer waters

“I told you it would be after the first. Besides its Friday, you’re out of class.”

“Professor McGonagall came and told me I had to hurry and pack and go to Dumbledore’s office. Why in such a hurry?”

Sirius sighed, she deserved honesty. As much as he might like to protect her from certain truths that wasn't who she was. He knew she wouldn't thank him for it. "After my experience with the ministry today it seemed important to make this official before they could change their minds." He set the license and the wedding bands down on the kitchen table. She walked over to the table, sat down and just stared at them.

Sirius conjured a quill and a pot of ink and signed his name. He lay the quill and license in front of her. "It's not official until you sign it," he said gently. She read the license carefully and then picked up the quill and signed. Her hand was shaking so badly she could barely get her name down. Sirius picked up her left hand and with a sympathetic look on his face he slid the ring on for her. He placed the other ring on his own hand and both rings glowed for a moment. Apparently that was all there was to it. With absolutely no fanfare Hermione Granger became Hermione Black.

"I always thought I'd be in love when..." She looked at the ring on her hand, she couldn't help the tears. Sirius sat down beside her and pulled her into a hug. He just held her as the sobs wracked her body. He let her cry herself dry. His heart broke over her distress, she deserved so much better than this.

"We're in this together now," he said quietly. In her third year she and Harry had rescued him, he would have been fed to the dementors were it not for her. He was in her debt. Now she was faced with similar odds and it was his turn to rescue her. He didn't get to choose the method of her salvation.

Sex out of necessity was hardly a turn on, neither was an unwilling woman. Were she any other witch this would be easy for him. There was a chasm between what they had been to each other and what was required of them. The discomfort created by the path in between was oppressive. Somehow they had to get beyond this point. These thoughts ran through his head as he held her, comforting her.

With a loud sniff Hermione pulled back, she wiped her eyes and gave him a smile of thanks. The discomfort which had been his alone while

she cried became a shared experience. This one act stood between Hermione and a life among dementors. She decided to take matters into her own hands. "Let's just get this over with," she mumbled. She stood and shuffled towards the stairs.

He sighed. They were both making this harder than it had to be.

Sirius entered the loft and took her in, immediately feeling sympathy for her. She was sitting stiff backed like a statue on the bed. She looked terrified. He really should have considered a calming draught. Carefully he sat down beside her. He took a deep breath and steeled his resolve. He reached into his pocket and set a phial on the table beside the bed.

"While I've taken your mother's words to heart, I think we can do better than that." He began in playful seductive tones. It occurred to him a heart beat too late that this may not be the best way to sooth her. That just maybe her mother had presented an option that appealed. She feared the unknown but more than that, this was humiliating for her. She turned to look at him, her eyes pleading with him not to drag this out.

He realized in that moment that he couldn't charm his way through this. There was nothing playful for her here. For her this was harsh and raw. It was up to him to get her to see past her fear and uncertainty. He pushed a tendril of hair out of her eyes, tucking it behind an ear. "Remember our little talk the other day about sex being more than the bits fitting together?"

"You never explained what you meant by that."

"Love making is intended to be pleasurable. It's not really something that I can explain. Will you let me show you?" He dropped the seduction and spoke plainly and sincerely.

"Pleasurable?"

Sirius cupped her face, his fingertips rested in the hollow below her ear, his thumb caressing her cheek. He kissed her softly and sweetly.

His gentle kisses and caressing weren't the least bit frightening. He had managed to sooth her. He felt her relax just a bit. She took a deep breath.

"Ok."

"Just trust me tonight. We'll take it real slow." He placed tiny kisses along her shoulder, moving his lips toward her neck, when he got to the junction of her neck he nipped her lightly. She let out a tiny sigh and blushed furiously, she tried to look away but he placed a finger under her chin, tilting her head to look at him. "Liking it is the point," he said sweetly, reassurance in his voice.

His kisses started off soft and slow. He worked her up, gaining entry to her mouth. His hot tongue tickled and probed her mouth with practiced ease. She was surprised by how nice it felt. Awkwardly and timidly she began returning his kisses. He slowed down to let her explore him.

He crawled up on the bed and pulled her beside him, gently pushing her back against the pillows. He regarded her quietly for a moment before laying down beside her. He propped himself up on one elbow and leaned into her. He resumed kissing her wetly and full of passion. The hand not involved in holding him up rested on her arm, smoothing up and down. "You're going to tell me what you like and what you don't."

Her eyes searched his. "I don't know what I'm supposed to do," she whispered.

"Just relax and do whatever feels natural, there's no wrong here, ok?"

He snuck a hand under her shirt and slowly caressed the skin on her stomach. His mouth burned a hot, wet trail across her jaw. He nibbled on her ear lobe, "You were so sexy when you were angry with me earlier." His words shot through her.

“Me?”

He pushed her shirt over her head and let it drop to the floor. He gazed at her, “I didn’t see any other angry goddess in the cottage.”

Hermione started to giggle, his mouth on hers stopped her. He trailed a slow path down her neck. He massaged her breasts smiling when he finally got her to let out sweet, breathy little sounds. He kissed between her breasts and down her stomach, caressing the soft skin on her sides.

Sirius slid his arm behind her back, he lifted her up and with the other hand he unlatched her bra. He pulled it off and threw it to the floor. He lay her back down and rubbed his thumb across a nipple. She sighed at the contact. Sirius’ expert hands and lips were all over her. Hermione’s body was on fire, every touch, kiss or soft tickle seemed to burn into her skin. She was finding it harder and harder to obey her shyness. She was surprised at how much she was enjoying his attentions.

He pulled his shirt out of his pants and opened his belt, getting more comfortable. He sat back on his heels for a moment and admired her, she was naked before him from the waist up. “You’re absolutely perfect,” he gently he pressed his knee against her core. She couldn’t contain the moan. He bent over and took a tawny peak in his mouth, flicking his tongue against it.

“Sirius...”

He lifted his head, “I like to hear you say my name.”

She felt a moment of panic when Sirius flicked open the button on her jeans. He noticed her tense up and gently bit her nipple to distract her. She felt him unzip her jeans and sneak his hand inside. When his fingers found her moist folds he let out a soft moan. “Merlin, Hermione you are so wet, you feel wonderful.” He let her get used to the feeling of being touched so intimately. He stroked and soothed with his fingers, flicking his thumb across her clit a few times. She felt a pleasant sort of tingle in her belly. Hermione moaned his name; she

had never felt so good. "You are amazing. Love getting to watch you bloom."

Surprising them both Hermione wiggled free of her jeans, Sirius helped and then deposited them on the floor. "I never expected such lacy knickers out of you," he teased, glad how relaxed and willing she had become. Hermione blushed a little and giggled.

"Relax for me." Sirius bent back down to kiss her, distracting her as he reached his hand back into her knickers and snuck a finger into her, stretching her. She stiffened slightly but was soothed by his kisses on her neck. He snuck a second finger and tested for her barrier, she was definitely still intact. He began pumping his fingers gently in and out of her. "You feel so good, Hermione."

She could only moan in response, the tingle in her belly had increased to a pleasant burn, she thrust herself into his hand in time with his fingers without really knowing why, it just felt right to do so. Her breathing had increased dramatically and she was moaning freely, thoroughly enjoying the sensation. The burn continued to increase upon itself, growing and spreading. With it came a vague feeling of frustration that also grew. Sirius increased the pace, pumping faster and faster, watching with relief and satisfaction at how much she was enjoying him. The burn and the frustration fused, the combination seemed nearly unbearable and yet felt so damn good. Sirius flicked his thumb across her clit, over and over, sending little jolts of pleasure through her. "Sirius, I need...something..."

"Just let go," he whispered in her ear. He flicked his thumb hard across her clit once more and the burning sensation balled up and exploded sending a fire throughout her body. She cried out his name as her body shook the bed.

A thin film of sweat was across her brow, a pleasant warm feeling filled her and spread across her body. She sighed happily, "What exactly was that?"

"You've never done that for yourself before?"

Hermione shook her head, a silly grin on her face.

Sirius looked rather pleased with himself. "That was," he said nuzzling her neck, "your very first orgasm." His hot breath made her shiver. Hermione shifted in the bed a little, she looked like she wanted to say something.

"What's wrong, Hermione?"

She averted her eyes and blushed. "I liked that," she said in a shy, timid voice.

Sirius chuckled. "I noticed that."

He reached for the phial on the table beside the bed. He handed it to her, "Here, drink this. We don't want to add pregnancy to the list." Hermione drank the potion down, a new wave of panic washing over her.

Sirius sensed her anxiety, to sooth her he trailed his lips down her neck, he rubbed his thumb across a nipple bringing a quiet moan from her. "Trust me," he whispered to her. He nipped at the junction between her neck and shoulder. He paused for a moment to push his shirt completely off, on seeing his bare torso Hermione took a sharp breath. She had never seen so much of a mans body. His muscular, decorated chest looked delicious and sinful. She wanted so much to reach out and touch him.

Sirius lay back down, this time on her, supporting his weight on his arms. He kissed her mouth, her neck and ran his hands all over her. He kissed and caressed. She writhed and moaned. Her heart was pounding. Sirius flicked open the button on his pants and unzipped his fly before circling a nipple with his tongue but refusing to take it in his mouth. She arched up, trying to force it into his mouth, moaning in frustration when he pulled back.

He looped his fingers around the sides of knickers and pulled them off, tossing them over his shoulder. She instinctively closed her legs, she had never been viewed this way and felt suddenly shy. He slid his hands in between her knees, gently parting her legs. "So beautiful,

never be embarrassed about how you look when you're with me." Hermione wasn't even sure how he did it but she could feel her anxiety slip away with his words.

Sirius slid his pants off and onto the floor. Hermione got a look at his tented boxers. Sirius noticed where her eye line had stopped and was now fixated, she didn't look frightened for which he was glad, just curious. He slipped out of his boxers and lay down beside her. "Go ahead," he said gently. Hermione scooted a little closer and reached a tentative hand out and gingerly touched him. He let her do what she pleased only hissing and moaning with pleasure at the contact, making her blush. She ran gentle fingers all over, finally getting to touch him.

"Is that really going to fit?"

He moved over her body, kissing her mouth and gently massaging a breast. "Never been a problem before."

He positioned himself between her legs. He felt her start to tremble, giving him serious pause about moving forward.

"Don't be afraid of me, Hermione."

"I can't help it. Mum said it was going to hurt."

Sirius stroked her hair gently, "Only at first."

He worked her up again, kissing and touching her all over body. When he was satisfied that she was about as ready as she was ever going to be, he reached his hand between her legs, testing her.

"I want you to relax, ok?"

"Ok."

He slowly entered her, when he reached her barrier he stopped, pulled back and with one slow, fluid movement pressed through, opening her.

Hermione felt a hard pinch deep inside, she panted out her pain, grateful that Sirius had stopped. She looked at him, he was breathing heavily, watching her carefully.

“Are you ok?”

“Give me a minute.”

Sirius held himself deep while she acclimated. He was right, the pain didn't last. She wiggled to let him know he could continue. He kept his strokes slow and steady. He hissed with pleasure, he had to focus to keep from releasing too soon. “So tight...so good,” he moaned.

Whatever he had done earlier, this was ten times better. Every stroke brought a new wave of pleasurable sensation. He whispered passionate, filthy things in her ear, exciting her more. He was reaching far deeper into her than his fingers had. Every stroke brought more and more intense feeling. Her body told her it wanted something more, she began lifting her hips to meet his thrust. Her participation and increased breathing were his cues to take her a little harder, add a little more pressure and increase the friction. Sirius increased his pace while gritting his teeth against his release.

When she grabbed his ass and dug in, trying to force him in farther, he chuckled.

“Oh, it's like that, is it?” Surprised but pleased, Sirius dug his fingers into her, lifting her hips to meet his thrusting. He took her harder than he thought she could handle but hearing her cry his name in pleasure he pounded on. Feeling his need to release imminent he reached a hand between them and stroked her clit. That was all she needed, she cried out his name, her body convulsing around him. She squeezed like a vice bringing his release. Sirius cried out her name as he came. Panting heavily he tried to catch his breath. He set her body gently back down on the bed. He rolled to the side and pulled her to him, kissing her softly, whispering endearments.

Sirius planted soft, sweet kisses along her shoulder. “How do you feel?”

“Wonderful.”

He kissed her neck softly, "Not so scary, then?"

Hermione snuggled her body into his, feeling oddly comfortable with him. It was with no small sense of relief that the experience hadn't been what she expected. Mrs. Weasley may be right about him but it meant she had a competent guide through these tricky waters. For that reason she didn't care if his reputation was deserved or not. She would never forget his kindness and his patience.

“Thank you, Sirius.”

He gave her body a little squeeze. Her eyes fluttered closed, it was with a heart full of gratitude that she fell peacefully asleep.

[illegible]

A/N: Thank you for the reviews! You guys are awesome as always!

Playing with Rita and Draco was fun for me too!

I'm nervous about this chapter, sex scenes drive me nuts.

Aftermath

Number twelve, Grimmauld Place had never been so packed. The marriage law had served to swell the number of members in the Order of the Phoenix. Mrs. Weasley was preparing food for the meeting but wasn't her usual plucky self. While she was proud of her sons for their sacrifice it made her sad to think about what they had given up. Bill, Charlie, Fred and George had all broken off their engagements in order to marry muggleborn witches. Bill had a great deal of sympathy for Sirius as he was faced with a child bride of his own. He had already purchased Shell Cottage for he and Fleur, it was supposed to have been a surprise.

Ron however was off of the hook. The ministry added a clause to the marriage law. They decreed that any pureblood male of age who was currently enrolled in school was unfit to serve as a husband regardless of age or familial background.

Despite there being a now larger number of pureblood men willing to serve as husbands to protect muggleborn witches there were no new marriages. The ministry had dug in its heels and had a whole host of fresh excuses for why a marriage wasn't suitable. One good thing about Sirius and Hermione's union was that they had set a precedent. The ministry had neglected to include a clause about female students before Hermione and Sirius had exploited their lack of foresight. They couldn't forbid a marriage because the witch was still in school. Dumbledore wondered just how much trouble that would end up buying Hermione.

Snape gave a report on the goings on of Voldemort and his death eaters. Sirius had made an enemy of Lucius Malfoy who was trying to use his position within Voldemorts organization to exact some sort of vengeance against him. So far he had been unsuccessful. Voldemort had little patience with stupidity which is exactly what sending the letter had been. Snape cautioned that Lucius wouldn't let it go at that. If an opportunity presented itself Sirius and Hermione could be placed in danger.

Snape couldn't resist digging at Sirius. He sat back down and muttered at Sirius in his silky superior voice. "If you had left it alone when I excused Draco..."

Sirius didn't wait for Snape to finish. He flicked his wand under the table, vanishing the legs.

Snape fell to the ground with a crack as the chair shattered in to pieces.

"Sirius Black! Why can't you behave?" Molly's voice held just a hint of amusement. She was grateful to Sirius for protecting Hermione and also sympathetic to him. She knew he would never choose this but figured that Sirius wasn't a bad choice. She didn't necessarily approve of the match however she was pleased to have Sirius married. It was what she wanted all along. Molly would take what she could get. She was going to keep a close eye on things knowing how this could turn out. Sex was a phenomenal social lubricant, maybe something would develop here.

One after another the new pureblood members pulled names out of Dumbledore's hat. Most of the unmarried witches were young, many classmates of Hermione. Dumbledore didn't agree with Remus' analysis of the purpose behind the law. He didn't feel that it was aimed at pulling muggleborns out of the general population. He believed it was about pulling soldiers out of Hogwarts where the final battle would take place. If that were true, Hermione and Sirius didn't have long to stay in safety.

It was with no satisfaction that Dumbledore took note of the greater numbers in his little band of rebels. The marriage law served as one hell of a distraction from their goal as a whole. All of these new husbands would have to take great care with other missions, most couldn't serve at all. They had to stay alive and well for these witches.

October the first was just a couple of weeks away. They had to get in touch with their witches, explain their intentions and try to get these unions approved before the law went into affect. Dumbledore's contacts at the ministry were apprised of the situation. The plan was to descend on the Office for the Control of Unmarried Muggleborns

en masse. The hope was that the office would be overwhelmed and that some of these marriages would go through.

Rita had owed Sirius to let him know when her article would be coming out. She asked him not to say anything about it. She had received a bit of flack from the ministry which really irritated her. She was running it as an expose of incompetence. The Order was coordinating with the release of the article in the hopes that the increased amount of pressure would work in their favor.

Dumbledore expressed his concern to Sirius about the article however it was too late to do anything about it. Rita was like a dog on a hunt, nothing would deter her from running the piece. She was known for being outspoken against the ministry and it had brought her fame. Dumbledore worried that this time she had bitten off more than she could chew. He also worried what challenges the article held for Hermione and Sirius.

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Hermione hadn't wanted to talk about her weekend with Sirius, not even with Ginny. Her emotions were confused. She felt violated by the ministry, forced into doing something that should have been of her own choosing. None of these feelings were directed at Sirius though, his care made the experience wonderful. Her mind kept intruding with little snippets of her night with him. The memory of his voice, lips and hands would send a fiery ripple through her body. She found it overwhelming and even a little disconcerting.

Sirius had been right. She did see him in a new light. The experience had been emotionally taxing on both of them and yet there was a comfort between them. Getting through sex the one time seemed enough for the both of them. Neither was ready to break free of their previous roles. Hermione had woken up before him and had quietly showered and gone downstairs to make breakfast. He was still nude and so she respectfully gave him his privacy.

When he had emerged from the bed, showered and dressed she had felt some awkwardness. He wouldn't permit it though, engaging her in conversation and gentle teasing while studiously avoiding any

discussion of their love making. In fact the only time it was referenced was when they picked a day to meet each week. If she had been asked what the difference between them was she couldn't have put her finger on it. She only knew that it was there and that it was comfortable.

He had been considerate of her feelings, in the middle of the week she received an owl from him. It was just a short note to tell her that he had enjoyed taking her sight seeing and that he hoped she had a good week. She was seventeen and a girl and he seemed to know that a note from him would quell any doubts or insecurities she may be experiencing.

In the privacy of her mind she decided that on the whole the experience had been pleasant. She even admitted to herself that she had enjoyed it. She realized it was something she could handle. Never in a million years would she have chosen this situation but facing it with him was acceptable.

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Ginny wouldn't be put off for long. She understood that Hermione needed a little time to process her weekend and so she gave Hermione a couple of days to herself. Ginny believed that it would help her to talk about it plus she was just dying to know.

Ginny knocked on the door to Hermione's private room. Hermione let her in, offered Ginny tea who accepted readily. Hermione had been studying alone, away from the others. The awkwardness between her and Ron was something she had decided to avoid. Ron wouldn't speak to her at all except to grump and grumble. He handled his jealousy in a very predictable manner. Harry was just glad that Hermione was safe, he trusted Sirius even if he didn't want to think about it too much. When Ron wasn't around they talked and laughed as normal however Ron's presence created tension among the three friends.

Ginny pushed Hermione's books aside and stretched out on the bed next to Hermione.

“Alright, time to spill.”

“Excuse me?”

“Hermione, I understand you needed a few days to yourself but if you are going to get back to normal you have to talk about it.”

Hermione sighed, Ginny was probably right. It probably would help to talk about it.

“It’s not me, it’s Ron. He’s avoiding me.”

Ginny waved her hand in the air, “Not him! Sirius!” Ginny paused for a moment and then addressed the situation with her brother. “Although Ron is being a prick about it, I agree.” Ginny closed in on her true subject matter. “So, how was it?”

“How was what?”

“Hermione, you know what I mean!”

“I don’t know!” Hermione turned away from Ginny so she couldn’t see her red face.

“You were there, weren’t you?”

Hermione stood up and paced the room. She spoke with a raised voice, gesturing wildly with her hands. “Ginerva Weasley what do you want me to say? That every time I think about him I can feel his hands on me? That I’m confused as to how I feel about him now? What?”

Ginny smiled at her friend. “I’d say those were good places to start. So it was enjoyable, yes?”

Hermione sat back on the bed with a sigh, “Oh, yes. Most definitely.”

Ginny squealed and scooted close to her friend. “And?”

“And what? You want details?”

“Yes!”

“Absolutely not! That’s between him and me. I wouldn’t appreciate it if he did it to me.”

“Oh, alright.” Ginny huffed, she looked at her friend with a raised eyebrow. “So you think you have feelings for him?”

“I don’t know.” Hermione let herself fall back on the bed. “I know things were different between us afterwards and now...well, now I’m having trouble not thinking about him.”

“Different how?”

“Different...comfortable.”

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Hermione tripped and fell on her way to Transfiguration. Why was it always this class? She picked up her book bag which thankfully hadn’t scattered her books. She turned in time to see Draco Malfoy raise his wand. She was able to put up a shield charm just in time.

“I am amazed at your stupidity, do you have any clue what my husband would do to you?”

“You’ll pay for what you did to me, mudblood.”

He said that word to her so many times that it truly had lost its edge. Hermione rolled her eyes and flicked her wand at him. Draco hadn’t been paying attention to the wand in her hand. He began crowing like a rooster, flapping his arms like wings and mock pecking the ground for seeds. Hermione doubled over with laughter. Sirius had given her that spell to use in case Draco gave her any trouble. It wasn’t strong enough to do any real damage and would give her a chance to get away.

She couldn't wait to tell him how well it had worked when she realized she couldn't say a word to him. If he found out Draco had bothered her he could prove unpredictable. Sirius would be visiting her once a week in her private dormitory which meant he would have some access to Draco since he would be in the castle.

Suddenly Hermione's body flooded with a memory from that night. She blushed and tried to shake it off. These thoughts were proving to be a real nuisance no matter how delicious they felt. Hermione ran to Transfiguration, just making it in time.

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Sirius sat in the drawing room, slowly sipping his firewhiskey in front of the fire. He had been thinking over his weekend with Hermione, coming to terms with it. He'd had to push aside every thought of her mental preparedness and get them both through it. Now that it was done he felt maybe he had underestimated her. She had been a little shy the morning after, blushing quite a lot when she looked at him but didn't seem in any way damaged by her experience. Once he'd established that there would be no awkwardness between them she had become quite warm with him. He refused to let her feel like anything less than his wife. The ministry wanted them married and he would honor her as such. There was something quite comfortable between them and he liked it.

The truth he tried not to think about was that she had made him feel young again. It had been a long, long time since he had been with a woman that unspoiled and fresh. It was almost forbidden, a man his age getting to touch such a young prize. She deserved so much better than him and yet somehow she was his. He gave some consideration to what it meant that he, Sirius Black and all that had come to mean, was now a married man.

Sirius heard something at the door and turned to see Remus entering the room. He took a seat in front of the fire with him. "When did you get back?"

"Couple of days ago."

“So?”

“Well, it was a little tense at first. I really put my foot in it at her parents.” Sirius shuddered at the memory.

“I guess she didn’t take that well.”

“No, she was really angry with me. Called me a playboy.” Sirius had to chuckle.

“Called that one right.” Remus said this under his breath. Sirius caught it all the same.

“What! I am not!”

“You can’t be serious.”

“Every day of my life.” Sirius winked at his old friend.

Remus sighed at the poor joke, shaking his head. “You don’t work, living off your very considerable inheritance. You’ve never had a steady girlfriend and you’ve never even considered having a family. I’m not saying its right or wrong but it is who you are.”

“That’s not true, I’ve always wanted a family,” said Sirius quietly. “I’m just never where the nice girls are.”

“Which is exactly my point, you like to have a good time. The only thing a nice girl would get with you is trouble. Speaking of which, how do you intend to conduct yourself now that you’re married.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean are you going to show a little self restraint? If those rings know when you’ve shagged her they might know when you’ve shagged anyone else. Could be embarrassing for her.”

“I really hadn’t thought it through.” Sirius conjured a piece of parchment, a quill and a pot of ink.

“ Can you?” Remus had been a casual witness to Sirius’ considerable sexual appetite. He never brought his women to Grimmauld Place because it was Order headquarters but he did go home with a wide variety of women. Some were ‘regulars’ others more recent acquisitions.

"I don't know, never had to before." Sirius penned a quick little note.

"If you embarrass her you know Molly will have your balls for it."

Sirius swallowed dryly. "Guess I'd better be a good boy."

“So, is she still mad at you?”

“Nah. She got over it.” Sirius grinned again at the memory of their mild flirtation in the cottage.

“And?”

“Well, once we both believed that I wasn’t going to hurt her it went just fine.”

“How did she like Salzburg?”

“Quite a lot actually. Wouldn’t let me take her shopping but we did some sight seeing.”

“She’s a pretty girl isn’t she?”

A soft look came over Sirius' face. "She's one beautiful young woman, Remus. I'm not sure what I did right to get so lucky."

[illegible]

A/N: I felt so loved after last chapter. I seem to be doing a better job than I think I am. I guess we are always our own worst critic.

I guess the thing I was the most nervous about was getting her apprehension right, making it believable while not over doing it. That was really tough and I'm still not certain that I'm satisfied with it.

Hermione is 17 and many girls that age do know more about boys but not all. Hermione has spent most of her time at Hogwarts being a nerdy little girl with awkward looks who has only had one date. I know she comes across a little wiser in the movie (Goblet of Fire: 'Viktor is more of a physical being' (I think I got that right))but not in the books, at least not that I've read. I might not have been one of them but I went to school with girls who really were quite innocent. I didn't go to public school which probably accounts for some of that. I hope that explains my reasoning behind painting her as innocently as I have.

One other point is that she is not faced with snogging a boy her age, she is faced with shagging a man twice her age. At 17 I don't think I would have been thrilled no matter how handsome and dashing he was.

This is going to make some of you hate me but here goes. In my head Sirius Black doesn't look anything like Gary Oldman. I fell in love with his character early on (shh, don't tell hubby) and developed a mental picture of what he would look like. I was surprised they cast Gary Oldman. Don't get me wrong, the man makes me sweat in Bram Stoker's Dracula. He just isn't Sirius, for me. I still have that mental picture to this day. I have to say Christian Bale is a good example except he is too young looking, in my head. Please do what you like with him in yours. (smile)

Grow Up

There was a feeling of desperation at number twelve, Grimmauld Place. They were a week away from October the first and only a handful of marriages had been approved, all of them with older muggleborn witches. So far the ministry had thwarted every effort of the Order to marry off girls who were at Hogwarts. Around fifty young women were looking at having their young lives permanently damaged by close, prolonged contact with dementors. The Order was discussing alternate safety plans. They knew from insiders that the ministry was prepared to invade Hogwarts to retrieve the women for incarceration. The best that could probably happen was for them to make a run for it but that took resources, more resources than the Order had available.

That wasn't the only bad news. While it hadn't made it into the paper yet, the rumor was that Rita Skeeter had gone missing shortly after her expose on the Office for the Control of Unmarried Muggleborns had gone public. The time for being openly outspoken against the works of Voldemort was rapidly coming to a close.

The best the Order could do for the girls was to bring the war to a close. They had more members at their disposal who were coming from more walks of life than at any point in the Order's history. If they couldn't do it now, they would never be able to.

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Sirius watched Molly as she flicked her wand this way and that making the kitchen clean itself. He wasn't really sure why he was waiting around to talk to her or even what he wanted to talk to her about. For some reason the older, motherly woman was very appealing to him and he wished to share in her company.

Mrs. Weasley tapped a tea kettle causing it to instantly whistle, she flicked her wand at the cupboard and two cups and saucers came flying out. She flicked her wand at the pantry and two teabags came whizzing into her hand. She poured the tea, put two sugars and a splash of milk in for Sirius and pushed it towards him.

“What’s troubling you, Sirius?”

“What? Me? Oh, nothing. I’m fine, Molly. Thanks for the tea.”

They sat in silence for a few moments each engrossed in their own thoughts.

“Without you that girl would be one week away from Azkaban.”

“How do you...nevermind, six sons.” Sirius let out a huge sigh. “I really can’t talk about this with you, Molly.”

“As you said, I have six sons. Try me.”

“No, Molly because if I tell you, you’ll have my balls.”

Molly placed a hand over Sirius’ in a comforting, motherly manner. “You know, if you enjoyed the sex that’s all right. It doesn’t make you a degenerate.”

Sirius let out a long sigh. “Yes, you are definitely the mother of six sons.”

“What did you think would happen, Sirius?”

Sirius shrugged his shoulders.

“Let me ask you a question. Did she enjoy it?”

“Well, she...I think so...”

“You think so or you know so?” Molly wore a knowing smirk.

Sirius chuckled at himself, “I know so.”

“So, what’s wrong with you enjoying it.”

“Who are you and what have you done with Molly Weasley?”

“You’re married, Sirius. You’re doing what married people do.”

“But she’s so...”

“Young, yes. Too young. But given the choice between sex with you and time with dementors I think she is better off with you.”

“I knew she was too young for sex. Do you think there is any lasting damage?”

“Dammit, Sirius! You’re focusing on the wrong thing. Too young for you. Not too young for sex. Give her a year she’ll be figuring this out for herself with someone her own age. As it is, she has you and just as well. Now, grow up, drink your tea, and quit your moping.” Molly smiled at him fondly, she didn’t envy his position.

“So, what now?”

“You got her through her first night. She knows what happens now, yes?”

“Yeah.”

“Enjoy yourself. The more natural you are the easier it will be for you both to adjust to this. She’s looking to you to see how to behave, Sirius.”

“Thanks, Molly.”

"I am always here for you, Sirius."

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Hermione gave up trying to study in the library. She had been distracted all day. As a result she hadn't gotten a lot done, she just couldn't focus on her work. The physical memory of her union with Sirius played across her body unbidden and unwelcomed. She

resented being turned into some mindless twittering female. This was not who she was. All the same her mind kept intruding with thoughts of him and what he could do to her. She had finally given up and was returning to the Gryffindor common room where she would be meeting him.

The boisterous laughter shared among the group died away when Hermione entered. Sirius looked momentarily confused but caught on pretty quickly. He was disappointed in the low level of maturity on display. Before she reached the couch the boys had bade their good nights and left for their room. Only Ginny remained with a very sour look on her face. Hermione sat down looking a little dejected.

“How long has this been going on?” Sirius levied his question at Ginny.

“Since she got back, Ron’s angry because he fancies her.”

Sirius felt a twinge of annoyance at hearing that Ron fancied his wife. “What about Harry?”

“Oh, he’s fine. He’s trying to get Ron to come around.” Ginny was pretty good at reading the subtext, she noticed the subtle change in Sirius.

“He’ll come around. He’s just got to get used to the idea is all.” Despite her week in agony, now that she was this close to him she began to feel a little nervous. There was a tickling in her stomach and her heart was beginning to pound. She had never felt nerves like this before, it was awful.

Harry came bounding out of the boys staircase. “I’m sorry about him, Hermione.”

“Oh, its alright.” Hermione knew Sirius was only looking at her with concern but she felt his eyes on her all the same.

“No, it’s really not.” Harry looked rather cross. “He could have spoken up a long time ago. If the two of you had already been dating

Dumbledore would have put you two together. As it was, no one knew for sure if he fancied you or not. Until now of course, when it's too late." Harry put his hand out to Ginny. "You ready?"

Ginny put her hand out, she smiled at Hermione and let Harry lead out the portrait hole. Hermione looked at Sirius with a raised eyebrow. "What was that all about?"

"Harry's taking her for a walk by the lake." Sirius stood and extended his hand to her.

"Really! Oh, thank god! I can't believe it took him so long!" She took his hand and led Sirius to her private dormitory. She showed him to her common room where she had couches and chairs and a fireplace. Hermione put her things away. Now that she had him to herself she had no idea what to do with him. Sirius made himself comfortable on the couch and watched Hermione flutter about. At first he thought there might be some point to her movements but it was becoming apparent that it was just nerves.

"Come sit by me, Hermione."

Relief flooded her; she was running out of things to do with herself. She walked over and sat at the other end of the couch. Sirius rolled his eyes at her and closed the space between them.

"Why are you nervous tonight?"

Hermione shook her head and blushed. "I don't know."

"We were so comfortable around each other when we left Salzburg. What happened to that?"

"It's been a strange week for me."

"Oh, the thing with Ron?"

"Who cares about Ron. It's you I can't get out of my head." She was grumbling and rather irritated with herself.

Sirius chuckled at the incongruence of her words and facial expression. He'd heard similar words before but never said so sourly. He pulled her into his arms and kissed her forehead. "I thought about you, too."

She relaxed into his arms, as soon as the tension left her body she started to cry.

"Hermione, what's the matter?"

"There's no one I can talk to," she whimpered.

"What do you mean? Aren't you and Ginny close?"

"I don't think she could help." She sniffed miserably, what she really needed was her mother.

Sirius began to worry this had something to do with him. "Hermione is there something about our love making that is bothering you?"

Hermione held herself still for a moment and then nodded. Sirius looked horror struck, he pulled her into his arms. "I'm so sorry."

"I can't get it out of my head." Sirius hugged her tight, maybe he should take her to Molly.

"I mean, the memories are wonderful but I can't concentrate on my studies."

Sirius paused in his mental self flagellation. "What was that?"

"My grades are slipping, Sirius!"

"Before that, Hermione."

Hermione blushed. "I can't get you out of my head."

"Yeah, what does that mean?"

“I keep remembering...and then I feel it...”

“And is this a scary or disturbing memory?”

“Well, no. Of course its not. Its...well...you were there!”

Sirius ran a hand across his jaw, he let out a huge sigh and laughed. “Merlin, Hermione! You scared the shit out of me.” He felt a huge wave of relief.

“Why? What?”

He grinned devilishly at her. He decided to take Molly’s advice to heart. “So, Mrs. Black...what sort of wicked, naughty thoughts have you had about your husband this week?”

Hermione turned crimson and couldn’t meet his eye.

“Oh, that good, huh?” And with that he scooped her up and carried her to the bedroom. He deposited her on the bed, taking her school robes off her with flair before he captured her lips in a heated kiss. “Well, I just hope I can measure up!” Hermione gasped and then giggled at his antics.

He began unbuttoning her blouse. “I wonder what McGonagall would say if she knew what you were thinking about in her class?” He pulled the garment from a giggling, blushing Hermione. He attacked her neck with wet kisses and nibbles bringing a variety of sounds from her.

He stood off from the bed and unbuttoned his shirt. “Or if Flitwick knew your mind was on my body?” He removed his shirt and his pants followed quickly after.

He grabbed her around the waist and pulled her skirt from her body, leaving her only in her undergarments. He pounced on her, covering her body with his, covering her mouth and neck in hot kisses, driving her out of her mind.

He reached around her and unclasped her bra, flinging it from him. He licked, nibbled and suckled her breasts. Hermione arched into him moaning freely. He had left her with a need she'd never had before, her week had been agony because this was all she could think about.

He pulled her knickers off and breathed in her scent. Oh, how he had wanted to taste her last week. He'd felt immediate guilt plus he thought that might be too much too soon for her. Now that he knew she'd been fantasizing, well...he'd give her something to really fantasize about.

Sirius wrapped his arms around her legs and blew on her sex. He buried his head between her legs and was about to taste her entrance. Her head popped up, he felt her stiffen and then struggle. "Just what do you think you're doing?"

"Will you just trust me?" Sirius held a struggling Hermione down until he could see she wouldn't relent.

"But, with your mouth?" Hermione scooted to the other side of the bed with a worried expression.

"Well, you'll never know if you don't come here and calm down!"

Hermione paused to take a breath. She was trying to think of something to say. Sirius seized on her hesitation and pulled her by her legs back to him. He leaned over her body and kissed her slowly and passionately. "I've done this once or twice more than you, will you please," he spoke seductively in her ear. "Just," he nibbled on her ear lobe, "trust me?"

Hermione relaxed and nodded her head, still apprehensive but trusting all the same. Sirius kissed and fondled his way along her body knowing he had something good in store for her. He wrapped firm arms around her legs to keep her from bucking and blew gently on her pussy. She would have jumped a little when he put his mouth on her but his arms held her still. Sirius lapped at her entrance and groaned out his pleasure. This was one of his favorite things.

Hermione begin to relax as she got used to the feel of his hot tongue on her most private of places. When he got to her clit the rest of her tension melted away, "Oh, God. Sirius...."

"I told you," he chuckled into her sex, the vibrations of his deep voice causing interesting sensations.

Sirius worked his tongue all over her clit, relishing the sighing and moaning. Hermione felt the tension build in her body so much faster than before. Sirius pushed his fingers into her, pumping her hard and fast. She released a long keening moan, and came all over his hand. Sirius licked his fingers of her as she watched in fascination.

Sirius laughed a little, "Nothing sweeter than your pussy."

His words had a physical effect on her, she could feel the sensation of heat pooling in her abdomen.

Sirius slithered sensually and slowly up her body, kissing and touching what he pleased as he went. Hermione arched against him, desiring more contact with his body. She couldn't believe how much she had changed in a week's time. This man's touch had burned its way into her memory and now it had her behaving in a most wanton manner. He made it all seem ok, almost like he expected the change in her. She could feel the last of her rational thoughts leave her head when his lips met her neck and his hands smoothed down the sides of her body.

Sirius worked her up again, his hand and lips bringing out moans and sighs from Hermione. Sirius held himself just outside her entrance, she could feel him, wanted him in her but Sirius held himself just out of reach. "Tell me what you want Hermione." His hot breath tickled her ear. She blushed when she thought about naming her desire.

"Ok, let me help." Sirius kissed her mouth heatedly, "Tell me you want my big," he nibbled on her ear lobe. "Hot," his lips slid down her neck. "Cock," he punctuated the word with a nip at her shoulder. "Sliding into your tight," he licked along her collar bone. "Wet," he swirled his tongue around a nipple. "Cunt," he ended where he

started. Hermione nearly released listening to his sweet obscenities. All she could manage was to beg the word please.

“That’s good.” He slid into her slowly, savoring the feel of her tight walls enveloping his shaft. He had driven her crazy with his words and his waiting, she wanted more of him but he continued to tease her with his long, slow strokes.

“Did you need something, Hermione?” His question brought to mind grabbing his ass and getting what she wanted. She tried to reach for him but he grabbed and held her hands over head. He used one arm to prop himself up. His pelvis continued to work, delivering his sweet torture as he held her hands away in the other. “Uh, huh.” That sexy smirk was firmly in place, he loved his little game. “Tell me.”

“Harder,” she whispered.

“That’s my girl!” Sirius thrust himself into, each thrust garnering a cracked moan from her. He pinned her body to the bed and pounded. He thought about flipping her over but decided that really was too much too soon. “Oh, god. Siriussss...yesss!”

Hermione grabbed a hold of the sheets and just tried to hold on. It was becoming clear to the both of them that this was how she liked it. He filled her with delicious, naughty sensations. With him inside of her she thought about things she could never speak of.

The burning sense of frustration had built up so she could hardly stand it and never wanted it to end. “Please...” Sirius grinned at her, her body was so new, it was so easy to please. He reached his hand between them and stroked her clit a few times. Hermione’s world exploded, a fire licked across her body as she shook. Sirius tried to hold on but she was too much for him, her vice grip milked him of every drop. Her name spilled from his lips, he loved how she made him feel.

Sirius rolled off her and pulled her to him. He loved the close contact that came after such intimate relations. It was a pleasure he didn’t always get.

He positioned himself that he could look at her. They smiled at each other, Sirius stroked her hair.

“Tell me what’s going on with your friend Ron. It hurts your feelings doesn’t it?”

“I wish we could just be friends again, like we all used to be. This isn’t my fault. The more I see this type of behavior the happier I am that I didn’t...” She flicked her eyes up at him, wondering if she was close to a faux faux.

“Get together with him?”

She smiled and nodded.

He kissed her on the forehead. “Come here. Let’s get some rest.”

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Sirius escorted Hermione into Hogsmeade, he was hoping she would let him take her shopping. He’d always thought it would be nice to have someone to buy for. Hermione spotted Harry and Ginny running to catch up. The four of them walked around the little village, Sirius knew more parts than they had ever been to before. He pointed the bad part of town out to Harry and laughed at the scowl on Ginny’s face. They walked back into the student centric part of Hogsmeade. Sirius spotted Ron and waited until Hermione was distracted to go confront him. Hermione noticed too late and sent Harry to intervene.

“What the hell is your problem with Hermione?”

“She was supposed to be mine.” Ron grumbled, almost bravely but more likely out of stupidity. He was talking about another man’s wife and that man happened to be standing right in front of him.

Sirius took a step toward Ron, not to threaten but to make his point. “Well, friend she’s not yours. She’s mine. Now get over yourself. She

needs the both of you.” Sirius looked Ron square in the eye until the younger man looked away.

Sirius looked at his godson, “See that he’s sorted.”

They watched as Sirius stalked off to rejoin Hermione and Ginny. Harry looked at Ron, it was time to take a stand. "Sirius is right. Done is done. If you ever cared for her you'll be a man about this."

[illegible]

A/N: Thank you for your reviews! They are much appreciated as always.

Please, please review!

A special thanks to Tasee1 for her insight. After I read your review I figured out how to say what I wanted to say. I used Mrs. Weasley.

I worked on chapters 7, 8 and 9 simultaneously. These two are experiencing something unique: unwelcome, unwanted and dear god, enjoyable. For her there has been no build up, she hasn't had months of kissing and petting to prepare her for what is happening and so it is overwhelming her. He has to reconcile his enjoyment versus his guilt over his enjoyment. And that isn't even dealing with the sex itself. He's basically chosen to sate himself with her and she's just learning. Thankfully they both seem to be enjoying the sex which will hopefully get them over the rough spots.

Like it or not they are in a relationship. I've gotten a few reviews that say they hope they will get together. They are together. They are as together as you get without being in love. Ah, I bet that's it. Will they fall in love? (Author shrugs her shoulders) Not sure yet. It's not a foregone conclusion. I can make an equally good argument for as against. I've got a good outline but I left the end open to see how I feel about these two.

Round Up

NC17

Ginny and Hermione were studying in Hermione's common room. Hermione's week had been better than the one before. She was still having a little trouble with unwelcomed thoughts and feelings but she was caught up in all her classes and hadn't been tardy once all week. Even Ron was starting to warm back up to her. The only problem had been a minor altercation with Draco Malfoy that Ginny helped her out of. Draco made an odd threat to her, he asked her what she thought would happen to her without Sirius. They agreed not to say anything to the guys for their own good.

Sirius knocked softly out of courtesy and entered Hermione's common room. He had the password but was considerate of her privacy. Hermione turned around and smiled, "What are you doing here?" She was pleased to see him but surprised all the same.

"Hello to you, too," teased Sirius.

Hermione blushed at her poor manners.

"Hi, Sirius!" Ginny looked up from her studies to smile at him.

"Hey, Ginny." Sirius seated himself in one of the chairs and lit a cigarette. "I came early for two reasons, one, its your birthday," he tossed her a small wrapped box. Harry and Ginny had already given her their presents earlier that day along with one from Ron. "And two, because tomorrow is October the first."

She looked puzzled for a moment and then comprehension dawned across her face. Dumbledore had excused any girls from classes who wished to return home. She knew that the Order was in touch with their families and was helping many of them leave the country. "Oh, no! Are there any girls left at school for them to take?" Hermione scowled at the cigarette in his fingers, she hated the things.

“I’m not certain but I don’t believe so. I’m taking you home with me because I don’t want them to ‘accidentally’ pick you up.”

“Oh.” Hermione had been working so hard to catch up she hadn’t given any thought to what day it was. She hadn’t even remembered it was her birthday until Harry and Ginny told her. “Let me just pack an overnight bag.”

“Actually, you’re staying with me through the weekend, if that’s alright with you. We thought it best to keep you away for a few days. Aren’t you going to open your present?”

Hermione was a little shell shocked. Her stomach did a little flip at the thought of staying so many days with him. She unwrapped his gift, it was a WWW item. It was designed to create a diversion to enable a sure get away. She smiled at him, he was always thinking of her safety. “Thank you, Sirius. I’ll keep it on me at all times.”

“Hermione, I’m going to go find Harry.” Ginny called out.

Hermione poked her head out of her bedroom door. “Alright, Gin. I’ll see you later.”

“Bye, Sirius!”

“See you later, Ginny.”

Hermione heard the door to her common room open and then close. Sirius leaned into the doorway watching while she packed.

“I’m sorry it’s such short notice. It only occurred to us last night that you staying here might not be a great idea.”

“I didn’t even realize that tomorrow was the first. I’ve been so busy playing catch up.”

She quickly finished packing her bag, smiling at his thoughtfulness when he offered to carry it for her. She walked with Sirius to

Dumbledore's office. They were travelling by floo to number twelve, Grimmauld Place.

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Number twelve was packed with Order members, many of whom she had never met. There were lots of new faces. Sirius introduced her around to those she didn't know, always giving her the respect of calling her his wife. It was a strange, quasi adult experience for her.

Hermione was delighted to see some familiar faces were there as well. Tonks and Lupin were seated close together talking quietly when she walked into the sitting room. Lupin was laughing softly and Tonks was blushing about something he'd said. "Hi, guys!"

Lupin looked up casually and greeted her, Tonks got up and gave Hermione a big hug. Kingsley Shacklebolt walked through to tell them that the meeting would be starting in five minutes. Sirius walked up behind Hermione and placed his hands on her hips. Lupin raised an eyebrow at the pair.

“Do you mind going up to the library for a little while? I’ll be along to get you when we’re done here, ok?” He spoke softly into her ear so it didn’t seem like she was being dismissed.

Hermione nodded. "Do you know where my things are? I need to get to my books."

“I put everything in my room. Do you know which one that is?”

Hermione's stomach did another flip. For some silly reason she thought she would be staying in her and Ginny's old room. Hermione shook her head.

“Come on, I’ll show you.”

He led her up the staircase. He noticed how nervous she seemed to be in his room. He stepped into her space, cupping her face in both

hands. He kissed her softly on the mouth. "I'm looking forward to spending a few days with you."

She flicked her eyes up at him and nodded shyly.

"SIRIUS?" Molly Weasley's voice floated up the stairs. "Where has he gotten to!"

Sirius grinned at her. "I better go. I'll see you in a bit."

"Coming Molly," he bellowed as he stomped down the stairs.

Hermione settled herself into her old haunt, the Black family library, to study. She forced herself to concentrate on her work because she was a little worried she might not have time once Sirius' full focus and attention was on her. He had surprised her with his kiss and was trying not to stress over what it meant. A couple of hours passed quietly enough and then sounds began to filter up through the house. The Order meeting must be over she thought to herself. A few minutes later she heard a noise outside the door and then Sirius walked in.

"Sorry that took so long. Are you hungry? Molly has dinner waiting."

"Starved, actually."

"Well, come on." He put his hand out and helped her up. He urged her down the stairs by tickling her sides and swatting her bottom when they got to the hallway. His antics were caught by Molly and Remus. Hermione was mortified. She wheeled around to face Sirius.

"Sirius Black if you don't cut that out!" She stuck out a finger and shook it at him, her face flush with mock anger.

"Or you'll what?" Sirius baited and then gently bit the offending digit.

Tonks came to Hermione's rescue by leading her away and calling Sirius a mangy cur. Tonks sat Hermione between herself and Molly. Sirius behaved himself pretty well during the meal. Molly only had to

raise her wand to him once which was an improvement as Remus commented on it. Sirius glared at him. At dinner she learned that the Order had been actively working with muggleborn witches, both in Hogwarts and out, and their families to get them out of the country. The office for the Control of Unmarried Muggleborns would have no satisfaction tomorrow.

After dinner everyone had somewhere to be except for Hermione and Sirius. She controlled herself and didn't look up at him but she felt his eyes on her. She knew he was watching her for a reaction to the new information.

Her feelings for him were as confused as ever. She had trouble relaxing around him until he put his hands on her, after that she was fine. She enjoyed his company but felt self conscious if they were in a group with other adults, especially those she knew. She wasn't looking forward to feeling tense for the next few days.

He had put her things in his room, which gave her a whole new set of things to fret over. Did that mean she would be sleeping with him every night? Did she have to have sex with him every night? Did he even want to? Did she?

Hermione had gotten so lost in thought that she didn't realize that almost everyone else had finished. One by one they were excusing themselves. Only Molly, Sirius and Hermione remained. Sirius got up and walked around behind her, she felt his hand on her shoulder. He spoke quietly in her ear.

"It's going to be alright, Hermione."

Her shoulders dropped as she visibly relaxed, she was grateful he was so good at reading her. He always seemed to know what to say to her.

Hermione found herself alone at the table with Molly Weasley.

"How have you been, dear? You've had a rough couple of weeks." Hermione had gotten up to help but Mrs. Weasley indicated that she

should sit. The older witch waved her wand a few times and the kitchen went to work on itself.

Hermione chewed her bottom lip for a moment, she wondered if Mrs. Weasley could explain what had been happening to her.

“It’s a lot to take in. So much has happened so fast.”

“Anything you want to talk about?” Mrs. Weasley’s waved her wand at the cupboard, two cups and saucers came flying out and landed neatly on the table.

Hermione paused, almost reconsidering at the last minute. “I’m never quite sure how to act when I’m around him.”

“Does he make you feel uncomfortable?” Mrs. Weasley waved her wand at the pantry, two tea bags zoomed into her hand.

Hermione sighed in frustration. “No! I don’t even know how to explain it.”

“Start from the beginning.” Mrs. Weasley fixed two steaming cups of tea and pushed one to Hermione.

“You know Sirius and I...well...we, um...we...”

“Yes, you’re married now.”

“I have horrible nerves when I first see him. I’m stressing over every little thing.”

Mrs. Weasley smiled to herself. “You just need some more time around him is all. It must be difficult only getting to see each other once a week.”

Hermione took a deep breath. “It that all it is?”

“I think so and I think that it will get easier as time goes on.”

“I could barely think that first week.”

“You need to learn to talk with him about how you’re feeling.”

Hermione reached out and touched Mrs. Weasley. “Is he ok?”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, this wasn’t his choice either. It can’t be easy on him.”

“He seems to be adjusting alright, just like you.”

“I just wish I knew how to thank him, for putting it all aside; my age, my friendship with Harry, all of it. He must have felt terrible at first but he never showed it.”

“I think some parts were difficult for him. Try telling him. I’m sure he would appreciate it.”

“You think so?”

“Yes, I really do. You run along now. I’ll finish up here.”

Hermione felt a little better after talking with Mrs. Weasley. She didn’t know exactly how to bring up either subject with Sirius so she decided to go back to her reading.

Everything was fine for a few hours until she felt tired and wanted to go to bed. She felt awkward just picking herself up and going to Sirius’ room for the night. She tried to rationalize with herself but her insecurities were winning out. She continued to read, trying to fight off sleep until it finally overtook her.

Sirius decided to turn in for the night, he went looking for her in the library. Sirius called her name to get her attention. When she didn’t stir he walked over to check on her. She was slumped forward on her book in a most uncomfortable looking position. He marveled at her dedication to her studies as he picked her up and carried her to bed.

He laid her out on the bed and rummaged through her bag until he found some flannel pajama bottoms, which he found amusing, and a well worn t-shirt. He stripped her down and dressed her for bed and then tucked her in. He pulled her little body close and drifted off to sleep.

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The next morning Hermione awoke in a strange bed. She blearily looked around the room and noticed that it was Sirius'. She also noticed that she wasn't wearing the same clothes, she was dressed in her bedclothes. It made her feel warm and safe to know that he had gone to all that trouble for her. She felt the space next to her and found that the covers were rumpled and that the space was still warm. He must have just gotten up. Hermione rubbed her eyes and stood up, stretching. She rummaged in her bag and found her house robe, put it on and went downstairs.

She found Sirius in the kitchen cooking breakfast for them.

"Good morning, sleepy head. Sleep well?"

"Good morning. I slept very well. Did you change my clothes?"

"Yeah, was that alright?"

"That was very thoughtful of you."

Sirius smiled and put a plate of breakfast foods in front of her. "Do you like eggs and bacon? I've got some toast as well." He fussed over her breakfast before sitting down to his own.

"Where is everyone?"

"All gone, we're all alone." He added a suggestive waggle to his eyebrows to get a giggle.

After breakfast Hermione took a shower and got dressed. She was on her way to the library to continue her studies. Sirius intercepted her,

he was starting to get antsy. He wanted to get out into the fresh air and wanted her to come along. He talked her into spending the day with him, just out and about. It turned out he knew London very well and she had a wonderful day with him. They finished their day at an Indian restaurant and a walk home afterward.

The idea of marriage to him had started out, in her mind, to be a piece of paper and the act of sex. She realized, slowly, that it encompassed a lot more than that. There was a growing fondness and understanding between them that she hadn't expected. They retired to the drawing room, he offered her a taste of his firewhiskey to which she giggled but refused. They curled up together on a couch while he played absentmindedly with her hair.

"I had such a nice time with you today." He kissed her on her forehead.

"I am so comfortable with you. Its odd because I always start off so nervous."

"I'm the same way about you, just better at hiding it."

"Do you know I passed out in the library because I didn't know if it was alright to go lay down?"

"You didn't! Why?"

Hermione shrugged her shoulders. "Couldn't tell you now."

They held each other's gaze for a long moment before she had to break away. His eyes held an intensity that was just too much for her. It made her stomach flip and her heart pound. Sirius lifted a finger to her chin, he tipped her mouth towards his as he leaned in to kiss her. They heard a sound coming from the fireplace and stopped just before their lips met. Their moment was interrupted by Molly Weasley as she stepped through the fireplace, Remus wasn't far behind. The pair could sense they had disturbed something but there was nothing for it now.

Hermione tried to jump up but Sirius held her close. "We're not doing anything wrong, Hermione." He spoke soothingly into her ear. She held herself tense, she was especially nervous because her former professor was in the room.

"I thought for certain you two would be in bed by now."

Hermione took Mrs. Weasley's words as a commandment, she gave Sirius' hand a squeeze and hopped up. She bid everyone good night. Much to her embarrassment Sirius told her it might be awhile for him as he had Order business to discuss with Remus. His words alluded to the fact that they shared a bed and she just wasn't used to the casual way it was understood.

She nodded mutely and fled the room. Hermione settled her belongings neatly and dressed for bed. She had just climbed in when Sirius entered the room.

"I thought you were going to be awhile?" She surprised to see him so soon.

He threw himself on the bed next to her. "You were upset about something, I thought that was more important."

"I'm sorry. I just can't seem to control my nerves."

"I don't get it though, we spent the whole day together."

"It wasn't you that made me nervous, it was them."

Sirius chuckled, "They nearly caught us snogging."

"I know," she said miserably. "I think I would have died."

Sirius got a very mischievous look on his face, he said nothing about what was on his mind. He caressed her face with his hand and kissed her forehead. "I really have to speak with Remus or I'd stay. I'll make it as quick as I can."

Hermione tried to stay awake for him but the bed was comfortable and her day had been long. It took Sirius an hour to return to her and by then she had passed out. He stripped down to his boxers and slipped into bed beside her, pulling her close before drifting off himself.

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Hermione woke up and found that Sirius was still in bed beside her. She snuggled herself closer, enjoying the warmth from his body. Sirius stirred almost immediately, he stretched and then pulled her close to his body, she could feel his erection pushing against her. His mouth found hers and then her neck and then her breasts. His hands smoothed up and down her body, he playfully pulled her feet up and yanked her pajamas off her body. He pulled off his own boxers and pushed into her slowly, bringing a moan from both of them. He kept his movements slow and deliberate, bringing their bodies to crescendo with sleepy, half awake morning sex. They reached their peak together, his a heart beat after hers and they collapsed together on the bed. They snuggled close for another half an hour before bothering to get out of bed.

Sirius kissed her on the forehead before slipping on a pair of sweatpants and leaving the room. Hermione took her shower and dressed before descending the stairs in the direction of the kitchen. She heard Molly chastising Sirius for not wearing enough clothes.

“Go back upstairs and put on a shirt, you’re not descent.”

“Making you nervous, Molly?”

“I’ve got six boys Sirius. You haven’t got anything I’ve not seen before.”

Hermione rounded the corner, her eyes locked on Sirius’ torso as he paraded around in front of Molly. Hermione couldn’t help but appreciate how toned he was and then there was that little trail of hair leading down into his pants. Hermione’s breath caught in a little sigh. Molly looked up to see Hermione salivating over Sirius.

“That’s why!” She pointed at Hermione. “I don’t want to watch her make cow eyes at you during breakfast. Upstairs, NOW!”

Sirius turned to look at Hermione and grinned wickedly at her. “Oh, alright.” He strutted up to Hermione and kissed her hard on the mouth. “Thanks for the ogle, you made my morning!” He sauntered past a somewhat breathless and blushing Hermione.

Hermione looked up sheepishly at Molly and Remus who both wore smug looks. Hermione took a deep breath and sat at the table across from Remus. Molly put a plate in front of Hermione just as Sirius was walking back in. He took a seat beside her and managed to behave himself during breakfast. Once they had finished eating and were conversing over their coming day Sirius casually draped an arm around her and played with her hair. Hermione blushed and swatted him away, he stuck his tongue out at her. They both tittered at their antics and forgot they had an audience. Hermione remembered first, her laughter trailed off and she blushed deeply. She looked up at Molly and Remus to see a pair of rather bemused expressions. Sirius didn’t look embarrassed at all, if anything he looked rather pleased with himself. Hermione excused herself to go study, she gave Sirius one last swat as she left in the direction of the library.

Sirius stuck his head into the library an hour later to tell her he was going out with Remus. She was studying several chapters ahead in everything since she was missing so many days. Molly brought a tray of sandwiches up to her for lunch but other than that she was alone for the afternoon. Just as she was putting her things away Sirius came looking for her, she was fairly satisfied that she was prepared for Monday. “Dinner’s ready.”

“Oh, perfect timing. I just finished up.” She moved to pick up her bag.

“I’ll get it. You want this in our room?”

“Our?”

“You don’t plan on sleeping elsewhere do you?”

“No.”

“Then yes. Our room. Tomorrow we can make it a little more you friendly.”

One dinner and a few hours later found Sirius and Hermione snogging passionately in the sitting room. She was straddled on his lap with her arms around his neck. She was torturing him by grinding into his crotch. They were sneaking around Remus and Molly, or at least Hermione was. When they were caught by Remus she tried to leap out of his lap. Sirius held her firm, “I like where you’re at.”

“Would you two get a room please,” said an amused Remus.

Hermione’s shyness overruled her arousal but just barely. She was finally beginning to adjust. When Remus left the room to afford them some privacy they made a run for it.

He pulled her up and caught her lips in a heated kiss. They struggled passionately with each other out of the room. They had just reached the staircase when the front door opened. They both froze, she giggled and broke free of him and ran to his room. He paused only to take note that it was Shacklebolt before he pursued his quarry.

The door had barely closed before his shirt was off. He picked up his wand and locked the door, silenced the room and divested them of clothing. Hermione shrieked and giggled at her instant nakedness. Sirius reached her and consumed her. His hands and mouth were everywhere, for the first time she ran her fingers over him without permission. He moaned at the contact, it would seem she had a similar affect on him as he did on her.

She marveled at the feeling of his muscles, in his arms, across his chest and back, everything about him was hard and strong. Hearing him moaning her name as she stroked his body gave her the courage to gently wrap her fingers around his cock. Sirius paused, she had his full attention. She wasn’t sure what to do to please him so she just touched and stroked.

“I need you,” his voice was low and husky.

“I need you, too.” It was the first time Hermione had spoken her desire without his prompting.

Sirius rolled onto his back and lifted her down onto him. He bent his knees to help support her and he showed her how to take control. She was a little clumsy at first but with his guidance quickly got the hang of it.

Hermione rode him to their completion, she enjoyed the sense of power she felt. Sirius grinned at her knowing she had really enjoyed that. She draped herself across his body and he wrapped his arms around her. He kissed her forehead and stroked her back, helping her calm down. Together they fell asleep naked in each other's arms.

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o0o0o0o0o0o0o0o0o0o0o0o0o0A/N: I hope you all have a lovely
holiday! This will be my last update before the New Year. See you in
2008!

Relax

NC17

It was the first week in November, one week since the last of the muggleborn witches had taken flight. There was something sad and subdued about the castle over the last week. The lost presence of so many friends was felt by everyone. The only house that seemed unperturbed was Slytherin. The tension between themselves and the other three houses was at a pitch like never before.

As the week wore on the teachers were having a harder and harder time keeping control of their students, hexing between classes was at an all time high. Even the normally docile Hufflepuffs had been getting in on the action.

During this time of intensity Hermione was caught alone in a corridor with Draco once again. She had figured him out by this time, he was so eager to hurt her he used his mouth before he used his wand. She faced off with him, her wand ready.

“You’re not as safe from Azkaban as you’d like to think.” Draco looked at her like she was trash, his lip curled in a sneer.

Hermione rolled her eyes, he was all talk, she was past being intimidated by him. She flicked her wand and silenced him and then for good measure made him do his chicken act again. She sauntered off to class without a care making it to Transfiguration early.

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Gryffindor had lost four of their older sixth year girls, two had birthdays in late September, the other two had birthdays in October. There was an outrage in the common room that generally made studying impossible. Harry, Ron and Ginny had taken to spending most of their time in Hermione’s private dorm. Ron finally made a full apology to Hermione and tensions between the two were ramping down.

Additionally Fred and George had pulled through for Ginny. A delivery of sweets was sent to the Slytherin table, the little candies were individually wrapped in green and silver. They greedily ate the confections without any thought because their table took frequent deliveries from home. An hour later every Slytherin sported garish hairdos in gold and red. No amount of magic seemed capable of reversing the affect of the sweets. The colors slowly wore off as the week trudged on.

Hermione had a hard time getting back into the swing of things. She had shared several days with Sirius and her head was quite full of him. In a moment of rash impulsivity he had taken her on the kitchen table. Even as it was happening she couldn't believe herself but loved the sheer naughtiness in it. It was a huge turn on, the need to finish quickly before Molly walked in and caught them. It was almost too much for her but she let herself get swept up.

Molly had walked in only moments afterward, almost catching them partially disrobed. The smell of sex hung thick in the air, Molly was no fool and told them exactly what she thought about such shenanigans. She wished Sirius didn't choose to use the entire house as his private bordello. Her face belied her anger, she hadn't been able to keep the sly smirk off her face. Hermione swore she heard a chuckle as she and Sirius fled.

"Hermione. Hermione!" Ginny snapped her fingers in front of Hermione's face. Hermione looked up, quite startled.

"What?" She demanded, her face red at having been caught in another daydream about Sirius. Her week had gone by at an aching snails pace. She had become aggressively irritable starting around Wednesday.

All three of her friends snickered at her, even Ron saw the humor in the situation. They gave each other knowing glances, when Hermione woke up tomorrow she would be more herself again. It was Friday and Sirius would be making his appearance in about an hour.

“I was trying to ask you about the color change charm, I keep getting more of a rainbow when what I really want is pink.” Ginny was pointing to something in her book, her pygmy puffsien looked like a miniature multicolored clown wig.

Hermione shook her head to clear it and adopted her know-it-all attitude while demonstrating the proper way to do the charm.

They continued to study, Ron was whining quite a bit. He had fallen behind without Hermione to push him to study. Hermione felt vindicated that he was still suffering from his ill treatment of her. There was a knock at the door and instantly Harry, Ron and Ginny started to pack up.

Sirius entered and smiled at the little quartet, his eyes found hers, they silently communicated their mutual need.

“See you tomorrow Sirius,” said Harry as he left.

“Bye Sirius,” chortled Ginny.

Ron stopped in front of Sirius and smiled a silently apology. Sirius nodded his head and closed the door behind him. He cast a locking charm on the door and turned to Hermione. They couldn’t get to each other fast enough. Their bodies collided in a desperate attempt at getting their clothes off each other.

“Need you,” he said huskily.

Hermione answered him with a moan as his fingers found a nipple. They attempted to make it to the bedroom but only got as far as one of the chairs. Sirius bent her over it with a grunt as he roughly pushed into her. She moaned his name as he pistoned in and out of her.

He hadn’t taken her like this before, his little experience with her and a kitchen table told him she was ready for this. Hermione was reaching her peak fast, this was gritty and hard. The fact that it felt a little wrong made it deliciously right. Sirius lay over her back and

whispered in her ear, he told her how good she felt, how sexy she was and how close he was getting.

With every rough push he slammed her clit into the overstuffed arm of the chair. "Sirius, I'm...I'm..." Before she could finish what she was trying to say her world shattered into a million heated pieces. Sirius was pulled over with her, he let a loud groan and her name as he came.

They collapsed into the chair together laughing at themselves, each wondering when it had gotten like this for them. Hermione curled up on Sirius and listened as his heartbeat slowed to a more regular pace. She thought about her conversation with Mrs. Weasley and considered what she could say. They curled around each other like cats for several long moments before Hermione spoke.

"I can't imagine how hard this must have been on you in the beginning." She raised her head to look at him, conveying her sincerity.

His hand played absentmindedly with a breast while he thought about what she was saying. "I was mostly worried about you."

"Still, I must have seemed a child to you. That had to be difficult." She kissed his neck tenderly.

Sirius shook his head, stroking his other hand down her back. "I knew you weren't a child. We had just never dealt with each other as adults."

"So this was a walk in the park for you?" She looked at him with a bit of scrutiny.

"No. That it was not. It's good now, though. Don't you think?" He had gotten past his issues and was prepared to leave them there.

She snuggled into him. "It's really true what you said."

“What’s that?” He kissed the top of her head and lightly pinched a nipple making her jump a little. He was beginning to think about round two.

“You said that sex changes the nature of relationships. We were friends before, I always held you in high esteem but now...now it’s totally different.” She lazily traced a finger along one of the tattoos decorating his chest.

“I knew it! Now that you’ve had your way with me, you’ve lost all respect for me!” He teased her lightly and flashed a roguish wink.

“What? I...oh...” She giggled at his joke and jumped when he tickled her. “Stop that!”

“Never!” He grabbed her arm as she leaped out of his lap. He pulled her back so that she was straddling him. He laved a nipple and got her to mew for his trouble.

Hermione felt his growing hardness and gave in letting him kiss and touch as he pleased. He lifted her up and pulled her down on him. He gave her less control this time. Gripping her firm round bottom he pumped his pelvis into hers, pulling her down onto him as he pushed up.

“Touch your breast for me.” She looked surprised by his command but did as he asked. “Good, now pinch your nipple, that’s it.” His commanding voice excited her as did the way he was now watching her every move.

“God, you are one sexy woman.” Hermione blushed at his words but was pleased all the same.

“Touch yourself.” She looked momentarily confused, she was touching herself.

“Take your other hand...” He paused to let out a moan. “And stroke your clit. I want to watch you...” Another moan escaped his lips. “I want to watch you play with yourself while I fuck you.”

Hermione struggled with herself for a moment. She had only just started doing this to herself, she wasn't sure if she was ready to do it as an act.

"Come on, let me watch you pleasure yourself." Hermione let a shy hand drop between her legs, she watched as Sirius eyes ate her naughty act with greed. "That feels good doesn't it?" He purred his encouragement to her.

Sirius began pumping faster, pulling her down harder making her breasts bounce along to his rhythm. He watched her, one hand tending to a breast, the other teasing her sensitive nub. Hermione felt that sweet tension begin to build in her once again and she quickly lost her bashfulness and stroked herself in earnest.

"Come for me." He was on the edge and knew she would pull him along with her.

Hermione felt the torturous ball of tension at her core explode, heat played across her skin as she called out his name. Sirius followed seconds behind her, together they let their bodies go slack in the chair. In the quiet afterward she marveled that her body obeyed his words.

They held each other, calming down, their heart rate and breathing slowing to normal. Sirius recalled her attention to their earlier conversation, before they became so distracted with each other. He sensed she needed to address the changes between them. "Does it bother you, the differences between before and now?"

Hermione thought about his question, lately nothing seemed to bother her about their situation. "No. Does it bother you?"

"We've settled into this nicely I think. There are about a million ways this could have gone wrong. As it is, I think I like it."

"Have you thought about what happens after?" Sirius detected a note of uncertainty, something about the question bothered her.

“After what?” He tilted her chin to look up at him.

Hermione pulled her head away, she snuggled herself into his chest. She wished she hadn’t asked the question but the cat was out of the bag now. She sighed and decided to bite the bullet. “After they get this law repealed.”

“That’s a big unknown, Hermione. We’ll worry about that when we get there.” Sirius stroked his hands down her back and kissed her forehead. He had given a great deal of thought to that question but didn’t want to upset the delicate balance they had achieved. “Let’s get to bed, I think we’ve earned a good sleep.”

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Severus Snape cleared his throat and stood in front of the Order to give his report. He took a swift glance at Sirius before speaking. “Lucius Malfoy is unrelenting in his desire to exact revenge against Sirius. He is still rather stung by Sirius’ performance.” He said the last bit with a bite of repugnance. In his opinion Sirius had done it for show without thought for the consequences. “The Dark Lord...”

Sirius coughed as usually did when Snape said those three words. It always sounded like a sloppy word kiss to his ears.

Snape paused to glare at Sirius before continuing on, “The Dark Lord grows weary of Lucius’ continual requests on the matter. It is only a matter of time before he lets Lucius do as he pleases to simply quiet him down. Additionally Lucius has convinced the Dark Lord...”

Another cough from Sirius who had an innocent look plastered on his face. Seeing the looks being shot at him from around the room, he smiled and said, “Something in my throat, sorry.”

Remus rolled his eyes at his friend’s childishness after all this time.

Snape picked up where he left off. “Has convinced the Dark Lord...”
Snape paused to glare at Sirius. “That Miss Granger...”

“That’s Mrs. Black,” growled Sirius.

“Do excuse me,” said Snape silkily. “Mrs. Black is flaunting her defiance of him because she is Mr. Potter’s best friend.”

Dumbledore cleared his throat. “Just what does Voldemort...” The room was filled with the sound of breaths being taken in sharply. Dumbledore paused to let the distracting noise pass. “Plan to do about it?”

“He is considering a number of options but it should be known to the Order that her success in this matter has not gone unnoticed. I fear she may be in some danger in the very near future and that precautions should be taken.”

“Such as?” Sirius raised an eyebrow at Snape.

“Pull her out of school and hide her here until the danger has passed.” Snape had a satisfied look on his face. He simply loved it when Sirius was cooped up in this house, he would be delighted to see it happen again. “I recommend that Sirius tuck himself away as well.”

Sirius laughed out loud, “Oh, you would just love that wouldn’t you.”

Snape sneered at Sirius, pleased to have gotten under his skin.

Dumbledore cleared his throat once again. “I believe Mrs. Black will be safe enough when she is at Hogwarts or even in the village of Hogsmeade. There is no need to hide her away here.” He turned to address Sirius personally. “I will trust your judgment in this matter. I don’t believe there is any reason for you to confine yourself here or at the castle...”

Sirius interrupted, “Excuse me, at the castle?”

Dumbledore raised his eyebrows at Sirius. “Yes, your wife does have a private residence there, does she not?”

Sirius cocked his head at Dumbledore. "Yes, but she's a student."

Dumbledore smiled at Sirius. "Why, yes she is."

“Oh, you must be joking. You can’t be sincere in your position on this.” Snape looked positively outraged.

“Severus this is no different than when we have faculty members who are married. They had to focus on their work at the school and make time for their family. Mrs. Black would simply have to do the same. She is Head Girl, I think we can expect a certain amount of responsibility and tact out of her.”

Sirius touched his finger to his forehead and then gestured with it. "Why didn't you say something about this before?"

Dumbledore looked at Sirius in surprise. “I didn’t realize I needed to.”

“This is outrageous...” Snape’s rant was cut off by Dumbledore.

“ I will not stand between a man and his wife, Severus.”
Dumbledore’s tone was friendly but it was clear he was finished discussing the matter.

Sirius grinned at Snape.

Let's see how the slimy git likes having the enemy in his home whenever he feels like it.

Snape sat down dumbly, dazed by what had just transpired. Sirius at school, all the time...

How could this have happened?

[illegible]

A/N: Thank you so much for the reviews!

I have most of chapter 12 completed and a good start on chapters 13 and 14. I still think I'll be wrapping this up at under 20 chapters. I am also midway through a new chapter of The Sacrifice.

About Ron, I know some of you want me to throw him to the lions, I don't blame you. However I've noticed in the books he tends to 1) React with jealousy 2) Show his ass for a few chapters 3) Come around and make his apology 4) Get forgiven by his friends.

Please Review!

Escape

Hermione woke up in Sirius' arms, it was Saturday morning and a Hogsmeade weekend. The night before he had held her down and tickled her until she agreed to let him take her shopping. She felt odd about letting him spend money on her, he seemed prepared to go crazy on her but she was determined to keep the damage to a minimum.

She lay in his arms and listened to him breathe as she thought over her week. It had been a week like no other in her experience. Sirius left last Saturday afternoon to attend an Order meeting and had returned Sunday morning to talk with her about Lucius Malfoy. She thought back to his confrontation with Lucius in Dumbledore's office. At the time it had made her very nervous, she had worried there would be consequences.

Then he dropped his bomb, although she could barely remember the conversation. He was touching her softly in tender places, gently and without any real intensity. Just enough to distract her from rational thought as he explained the situation. Professor Snape had recommended that he go into hiding again. She thought surely he would be more depressed about his predicament but then he told her Professor Dumbledore said he could stay with her. When he told her this he was leaving the most wonderful little kisses along her neck. Then he asked her if he could move in. She said 'yes' without even thinking.

Over the last week he had used the floo network to live between the two locations. She was worried at first that he would be underfoot all the time but he was very respectful of her. In the last week she hadn't been to the great hall for breakfast once. Sirius was an early riser and would go to the kitchens and charm the elves out of breakfast for two. She would tell him about what classes she had that day and what her Head Girl duties entailed. The others had figured out where she had been hiding and by Wednesday morning it was breakfast for five.

When it came to her study time he disappeared altogether, sometimes back to Grimmauld, other times to roam the castle. He had even ventured to Hogsmeade one evening. She had been

concerned that he would prove too large a distraction for Harry as well but that also wasn't the case. He had a knack for showing up when they were joking around or just letting off a little steam and then vanishing when they weren't.

She wondered where he got off to and whether or not he was causing trouble. Her potions class that Tuesday afternoon told her everything she needed to know. Professor Snape was the coldest, most controlled man she had ever laid eyes on. He swept about the castle like an overgrown bat, soundlessly and nearly omniscient. He moved with practiced grace and projected a sinister aura.

The Tuesday after Sirius moved in he stumbled ungainly into his classroom. The first thing she noticed was that his hair appeared to have been washed. The static in his squeaky clean hair caused it to lift slightly in places and flutter as he moved. The most memorable thing of all was the fact that he left her and Harry completely alone. They were nearly invisible to him until she raised her hand to answer a question. Seeming to struggle with himself and against his own volition he actually picked her. The mouths of every student in the classroom dropped open as they stared in dumb fascination. That was the best potions class she had ever had.

The low point in her week had come the following day. Hermione heard a voice behind her. "So here we are about to do our little dance, only I've got you this time mudblood" Hermione didn't have time to react to him however Sirius had turned the corner as Draco had started to speak. He saw what she couldn't and he flicked his wand at Draco. She turned in time to see the blond crumple to the ground.

"Your little dance? What did he mean by that, Hermione?" All she could think about was how angry he was going to be when he found out she hadn't confided in him.

"Your little dance?" He queried a second time with a hint of agitation creeping into his voice. Comprehension dawned on his face as he moved toward her like a predator. She backed herself into the wall.

Sirius leaned into her, he had one hand resting on the wall above her head the other was tracing a line from her cheek down to her neck. She held her back stiff against the wall. His voice was soft but there was a dangerous edge to it. "So...just how long has this been going on?"

Her eyes flicked to the prone form of Draco lying on the castle floor, she could feel the anger radiating off of him. Hermione shook her head, she opened her mouth to try and lie but all that came out was a scratchy whine. "I see..." said Sirius. "Since our little meeting in Dumbledore's office." He made a little clicking sound with his tongue. He flicked his wand lazily and sent off a patronus.

His eyes bored into hers, she tried to look away but he forcibly turned her head to face him. He instantly softened his grip on her jaw when he heard her whimper. "Why?"

Hermione's first word was a high pitched unintelligible squeak, she cleared her throat. "I...I just didn't want you to do something rash." Her eyes flicked to Draco once again.

"That wasn't rash, Hermione." He growled, "Your back was turned and he was about to hex you."

Harry and Ron rounded the corner, for a moment it looked to them like Sirius and Hermione were having an intimate moment against the castle wall. Her body language read different and both boys were swept up in protective waves for her.

"Hermione are you, ok?" Asked Harry tentatively.

Sirius casually turned his head to look at his godson, he took in Harry's aggressive stance and chuckled softly. "I'm not hurting her, Harry." He turned back to her and spoke in the same soft voice. "Just how angry are they going to be with you?"

Hermione whimpered in the back of her throat. She closed her eyes for a moment and took a deep breath, when she opened them she had a defiant glint in her soft brown eyes. She observed the over

protective males surrounding her and was overcome by a surge of anger. Sirius read the change in her instantly and stepped back in mild amusement.

“Draco has been stalking me on my way to Transfiguration every Wednesday. I have managed to look after myself. I’m not some silly girl who doesn’t know how to take of herself!” She was fuming, her face was flush with her anger and her eyes had taken on a dangerous glitter.

Only Sirius took note of Professors Dumbledore and McGonagall who were now standing along the sidelines of the little confrontation, listening intently.

Ron rounded on her first. “Every week?,” he shouted. “Every week! How could you not tell us, Hermione?”

Harry looked at her with hurt and disbelief. “Why didn’t you tell us, Hermione? We’re your best friends!”

When she spoke her voice had a high, shrill quality. “Why? Are you serious? The last time Ron nearly got himself expelled!”

“You underestimate me Mrs. Black.” The trio of friends jumped slightly at hearing Professor Dumbledore’s voice. “I would never expel a student for coming to the defense of a friend.”

Hermione quailed at the Headmaster’s voice, who wasn’t she going to be in trouble with today?

“ Really, Mrs. Black,” began Professor McGonagall. “No one believes you can’t take care of yourself but you should have told some one what was going on. I’m very disappointed in you.”

“Harry, would you and Ron please go and fetch Madam Pomfrey and let her know we have an injured student.” Dumbledore smiled kindly at the boys. Dumbledore walked over to Draco and bent down to check on him. While they waited Hermione snuck a look at Sirius. He was looking directly at her and he was anything but pleased.

The boys returned with Madam Pomfrey who shot an angry look at Sirius. She fussed over her patient, reviving him and then walking him past the group that had gathered there because of his actions. Sirius took a step toward Draco but Madam Pomfrey pointed her wand at him and fixed him with a lethal glare. Sirius backed down but continued to glare at Draco who was trying to look invisible behind the medi-witches body.

“Sirius, will you and your wife please accompany myself and Professor McGonagall to my office.” Dumbledore turned his attention to the boys. “I think that’s all for now,” he spoke to Harry and Ron. “You two can return to your common room and wait for Mrs. Black there.”

Hermione allowed herself to be led by Sirius to Dumbledore’s office. They waited while Professor McGonagall found Professor Snape. Hermione took note of the wary way in which Snape regarded Sirius.

Hermione recounted the last several weeks beginning with her first encounter with Draco. She glanced at Sirius’ face a few times, he was working hard at a calm exterior however his teeth were clenched and a little muscle in his jaw was occasionally jumping. Once she had finished her story Professor McGonagall was the first to speak.

“You were to notify us immediately if anything else happened. The fact that you deliberately withheld information about an attack...did you stop to think that he may have been doing the same thing to other muggleborn girls?” McGonagall’s eyes were trained on Hermione in a hard stare.

Hermione’s head popped up, she looked at her Head of House with true remorse, she hadn’t considered that possibility. She shook her head and thought about who else might have had to suffer Draco’s treatment the way she had.

“Well...I am giving you a week’s worth of detentions to think over your actions. You are Head Girl and have a responsibility to the

safety and welfare of the students of this school.” Hermione stared at McGonagall in disbelief.

Professor Dumbledore turned his attention to Sirius. “You attacked one of my students.”

“I acted in defense of my wife,” replied Sirius, there was a defiant look in his eye. “According to you that boy will now be expelled.”

“Yes, he will.” Hermione felt a cold chill run down her back at Dumbledore’s words. If Lucius was mad now, what would happen when he heard about this? “But Sirius,” continued Dumbledore, “you could have simply cast a shield charm on her and defended her just as well.”

“I merely put him to sleep, which is a standard defensive strategy.” Sirius words carried a tinge of ice, he thought having to explain his actions was ludicrous. He would do as he pleased where Hermione was concerned.

“Very well, but if you feel the need to defend her against any of my other students lets keep it to shield charms.” Despite the firmness of his words there was a hint of amusement in the old man’s eyes.

Sirius gave him a curt nod. “Are we done here? I have a few things to discuss with my wife.”

He heard Hermione groan in the seat next to him. Would this day never end, she thought to herself?

“I think that’s all.” Replied Dumbledore.

Sirius grabbed her by the arm once they had stepped clear of the gargoyle. “Inform your friends they are not to disturb us tonight, they’ll just have to study elsewhere.” The edge to his voice was sharp, she could hear the smoldering anger.

“Sirius...”

He walked away from her without looking back. "I'm going to the kitchen to get dinner."

Hermione felt drained as she walked back to the Gryffindor common room. Harry and Ron spent a full ten minutes dressing her down for keeping something like her safety from them.

Ron squealed like a girl when he heard that Malfoy was being expelled. He and Ginny danced happily around the common room, laughing wildly and grinning like loons.

Hermione's worried expression prompted Harry to push for more information. She reluctantly filled them in on the current potential threat from Lucius Malfoy. Harry understood the threat immediately but Ron was having trouble with any concept other than no more Malfoy. Harry was glad Sirius was around to protect Hermione because he feared the worst. Hermione trudged off to her dormitory to receive her final tongue lashing for the day.

Sirius was already waiting for her when she arrived. He appeared to have cooled down a little but he still had a hardness to his gaze. The tension in the room was thick and getting heavier by the minute as neither one of them were speaking.

Sirius finally broke the silence. "A fellow student, a fellow male student pushes you down and licks and you, what, say nothing? Nothing?"

"Sirius..."

"That was rhetorical. I'm not nearly done. As pleased as I was to hear that you defended yourself you should have confided in someone. Do you have any idea what your safety means to me? I altered my entire life to keep you safe and this is how you repay me?" He walked over to her and smoothed his hands down her arms. He picked her hands up in his and kissed them each. "I am not complaining but you are going to have to start trusting me."

Tears slid down her face, she felt so ashamed of herself. She had good intentions in bearing the burden alone but hearing it from someone else's point of view made her reasoning seem a bit shallow. Sirius pulled her onto a couch with him and held her close.

"That Poulterous Charm works rather well, does it not?" Sirius chuckled, his breath tickled the skin on her neck. She stifled the shiver unwilling to let his charm work on her.

She thought about the first time she made Draco do his chicken dance. Then she thought about his father. "Lucius Malfoy is going to be really angry when he finds out that his son is expelled."

Sirius wrapped his arms around her a little tighter. "I'll keep you safe, I promise." His hands caressed the soft skin on her back, she couldn't suppress the shiver this time. Sirius chuckled softly and shifted in his seat so that he had better access to her. He gently took her by the back of the head and kissed her with passion. He tilted her head to change direction slightly, this way and then that. He pulled back to look into the eyes of a breathless Hermione. "I couldn't stand it if anything happened to you."

The look in his eyes took her breath away. His eyes were filled with an emotion she was unfamiliar with, it was a raw, possessive look. Hermione wasn't sure how she felt about that. The emotion he was projecting made her feel naked and exposed, his eyes bored into hers, searching for something.

She tried to dismiss it, justify it in a way that was more comfortable for her. Maybe it was just attraction and affection. She was certainly attracted to him and held him in great affection.

She remembered the very first time she noticed his rare masculine beauty. It was their second weekend together. He had been gentle but so much more passionate and playful than their first encounter. With the fear out of the way he showed her how much fun it could be. She didn't know why she hadn't seen it before; what a beautiful man he was.

She suddenly realized they had been looking into each other's eyes for a good minute. There was a question on Sirius' face that she wasn't ready to answer yet. She averted her eyes and snuggled herself into his warm embrace. He held her that way, just listening to her breath for a long while. His stomach rumbling urged him to move, he shifted a little to find she had passed out in his arms. He picked her up and carried her to the bedroom, dressed her for bed and tucked her in.

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Hermione blinked her eyes, pulling herself out of her reverie. She nudged the sleeping Adonis next to her who began to stir groggily. She reminded him that her friends would be showing up within the hour so they needed to get a move on. He grumbled at being denied his morning romp with her but obediently dressed and left for the kitchen.

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Sirius was escorting Hermione and Ginny into Hogsmead, they walked along at an easy pace. The boys were anxious to see Fred and George's new shop and had run ahead of them. Just as they were entering the outskirts of the village Harry and Ron came running down to them.

"Death Eaters!"

Sirius scanned the area in front of him, there were three men in black cloaks running toward them. He gave Ginny a hard push in the direction of the castle and told them, "Run!"

Hermione surveyed the situation, her friends were sprinting away while Sirius had taken on a battle stance. Their pursuers were closing the distance between them. She pulled Sirius' birthday gift out of her pocket and activated it. It wouldn't help them but it would keep her friends safe. The diversion created a screen behind them, the danger however, was in front of them.

Standing behind the Death Eaters were two ministry officials and a dementor. One of the Death Eaters shot a curse at them and hit Hermione square in the chest, she collapsed to the ground. Sirius shot back and scooped her up and was gone with a soft 'pop.'

Sirius apparated them to the alley behind number twelve Grimmauld Place, he rounded the corner and saw two Death Eaters watching his home. He knew they couldn't actually see it but were hoping to catch them making an attempt at returning. He quickly turned on the spot and arrived at the Burrow. He ran inside and yelled for Molly.

She came running down the stairs, took in the sight before her and grabbed her medical kit. Sirius muttered, "Ennervate" and Hermione began to come around. Suddenly there was a loud banging on the kitchen door.

"Sirius, what happened." Hermione looked groggily around. "Why are we at the Burrow?"

"Shhh," he soothed. "We're in a spot of trouble, I need you to keep a cool head."

Molly shoved a few bottle of potion into his hand, "Get out of here, I'll stall them."

Sirius pulled Hermione into his arms and spun, they arrived at Shell Cottage only to find Death Eaters banging away on Bill's door. Sirius swore under his breath and ducked two curses. He closed his eyes and thought carefully about where he was going to take her.

They touched down outside the cottages in Austria, Sirius cast a spell to detect human presence. There was someone inside the cottage. The door opened to reveal Bellatrix Lestrange, he heard her inhuman laugh as she raised her wand against them. Sirius and Hermione were gone before Bellatrix could complete her attack.

Hermione was terrified, they couldn't seem to shake their attackers. She looked around at where Sirius had brought them. All the signs were in German but she didn't recognize the town as being Salzburg.

Sirius grabbed her hand and they ran across the street to a little hotel. They quickly got a room and got themselves indoors. He set up a series of complicated wards, drew all the blinds and fell across the bed, completely exhausted.

“We’ve got to get out of Europe.” Sirius knew where he planned to take them. It had been a number of years since his visit but he had friends there and he knew they would take them in. “Let me rest a little while and we’ll go.”

“Go where?”

“Mexico.”

[illegible]

A/N: Thank you for the reviews! They really do help keep the story on track and serve as guide in the more subtle aspects of the story.

I'm glad you liked my use of Dumbledore. There is something mischievously meddling about the old man that I really like. At the same time I didn't want to lay it on too thick.

I know that Hermione did get hurt and some of you expressed a dislike for stories where she is a victim until the end where she gets rescued. I had never planned a scenario like that but also wanted to emphasize the danger they were in.

I punished Malfoy, hope you approve.

Please review!

Closer

NC17

Hermione lay down next to Sirius and let him pull her into his arms. She could tell he needed his rest, he had just put forth a monumental effort and they weren't close to finishing their escape. She kept her thoughts to herself for the time being. She was still winded from having been stunned, her eyes drooped and she fell asleep next to Sirius.

When Sirius roused her a few hours later she felt as if though she had only just fallen asleep. She was stiff and her whole body ached. Sirius gave her a Pepper Up potion and took one for himself. He had gone out for food and together they ate quietly. They were in very serious danger and it served to dampen their mood.

"We're going to have to stay on the run for awhile. I have some friends in a little fishing village located just North of the Guatemala border on the Pacific side. I met them when I was on the run after my escape, thanks to you."

"Why Mexico?"

"Lily absolutely loved Westerns, a bit mental I always thought but she dragged us all with her to the movers..."

"Movies."

"Oh, right. Movies. Well, when she could she'd drag us to see a Western. The muggle outlaws always ran to Mexico."

Hermione laughed lightly at his reasoning. She thought about their situation and immediately sobered. "What's going on Sirius?"

Sirius stood up paced back and forth in front of the bed Hermione was sitting on. "It looks like Dumbledore was wrong, we weren't safe in Hogsmeade. Dammit, they were everywhere."

“Can they get away with that? Have things gotten that bad out there?”

“We knew we were close, just not this close. That damned law was our first indication that the ministry was being infiltrated. Voldemort must have taken over the ministry.”

“How did they know about the cottages?”

“Bella has a right to use them, same as I do. She must have been following a hunch, she’s crazy not stupid. The fact that she was there means there has been a break out at Azkaban.”

Tears started sliding down Hermione’s face, she was trembling and still in shock. “Do you think Mrs. Weasley is alright?”

Sirius thought about her question, he had no idea but he needed Hermione as together as possible. He sat down on the bed beside her and wrapped his arms around her. “They were after us, pet. I’m sure they interrogated her, maybe searched the house and then let her be.” He desperately hoped he wasn’t lying.

“This was huge, Sirius. That couldn’t have been about just us, it was on too large a scale. Would You-Know-Who really risk it all for Lucius Malfoy?”

“I think there was probably more than one thing going on at once but getting a pureblood son expelled at the expense of a muggleborn wouldn’t sit well.”

“Will we be safe in Mexico?”

“Oh, yeah. Its not some muggle tourist trap, it’s just a quaint little village, maybe a dozen families in all. It’s the perfect place to disappear. I’ve never told anyone about this place in case I ever had to return.”

“When do we leave?”

Sirius smiled softly and tucked a stray curl behind her ear. "As soon as you're ready."

Hermione chewed her lip and then spoke, her voice laced with anxiety. "I don't have any clothes or anything."

"I'm sure my friends have some clothes they can lend you." He soothed gently.

Hermione took a deep breath. "Well, then...I guess I'm ready now."

Sirius wrapped his arms around her and kissed her softly. "We're going to be just fine. I've done this before. Try and think of it as a little adventure."

Hermione nodded and put on a brave face, it didn't feel much like an adventure to her. She felt like she was abandoning her friends in their hour of need but there didn't seem to be any way to get back to them. She was scared but felt safe with Sirius.

"When do you think it will be safe to return?" She said with a hesitant voice.

"I'm not sure, Dumbledore will contact us when he can."

They left their hotel room and walked down a little cobblestone street and turned into an alleyway. Sirius looked around, he didn't see anyone, he flicked his wand and sent off a patronus and then embraced Hermione and together they left with a soft 'pop.'

Hermione had never Apparated so far before. The trip seemed to take forever. By the time he landed them at their destination she felt like she had been torn apart. Sirius staggered a few steps and checked her over for splinching. When he was satisfied that she was alright he fell to his knees, breathing heavily. Hermione grabbed him by the chest to try and help support him, she almost toppled them both over with the effort. He touched his hand to her face and then held it up to stop her.

“I’m fine. Just tired.” He staggered to his feet and wrapped his arm around her for momentary support. He stepped free and smiled weakly at her, “See, just fine.” He took her by the hand, “Come on. Lets look around.”

The first thing Hermione noticed was that the sun was high in the sky. They had left around seven in the evening in Germany but it appeared to be closer to noon here. The second thing she noticed was how much warmer it was, they were much closer to the equator and it made a huge difference. She looked around and took in the sandy beaches surrounded by lush vegetation. She noticed a few colorful birds in the trees and was reminded of the bird Sirius had sent to Harry in their fourth year. There was a raw, unspoiled beauty to this place.

They were about a hundred feet away from a small house, Sirius took her hand and walked them towards it. As they got closer they could hear voices but she couldn’t understand a word that was being said.

A thin woman rounded the house, her clothes were clean but well worn. She was stooped over, working in her garden. She spotted the approaching couple, stopped her work and stared. It took her a moment to find her voice.

“Perro?”

“Buenas tardes, Lupe.”

The woman looked at him cautiously as she neared the pair, she seemed to recognize him finally because her whole demeanor changed. She smiled broadly and rushed forward, embracing Sirius in a very motherly hug. “Has cambiado, Perro. Te ves mejor. You look much better than last time.” The woman spoke with a thick Spanish accent that was difficult for Hermione to understand. Hermione thought about what the woman meant and then remembered how thin and ratty he had looked when she, Ron and Harry had visited him in the cave. The contrast between then and now couldn’t have been more striking, he was filled out nicely, his frame covered in hard muscle.

The woman looked Hermione over and smiled at her, she looked back at Sirius and grinned at him with a raised an eyebrow. “La chica es muy bonita, Perro. Very pretty.” Her words brought a rosy tint to Hermione’s cheeks.

Sirius smiled and brought Hermione closer to his friend. He gestured to Hermione. “Ésta es mi esposa, su nombre es Hermione. Hermione this is Guadalupe Sandoval.” He whispered conspiratorially to Hermione. “My Spanish is awful, but we’ll muddle through.”

Hermione put her hand out to shake, the woman gave a friendly laugh and ignored the proffered hand. She wrapped Hermione, who was a taken aback, in a warm hug.

“¿No es tu hermana, o sí?” She directed her words first at Sirius and then at Hermione. “Sister?”

“No, no! Her-my-o-knee.” Said Hermione quickly, wondering what brought on that ridiculous question. This wasn’t the first person to have trouble with her name.

“Her-mi-ninny?”

“Her-my-o-knee, my-o-knee.” It was the second half of her name that always gave them trouble.

Lupe threw up her hands and rattled something off in Spanish. She paused for a minute, seeming to ponder something. “I call you Mimi.” She flashed them a big, friendly smile before turning away from them for a moment calling out to someone they couldn’t see.

“How did you come to be christened Perro?”

Sirius grinned at her, “It means dog in Spanish.”

“They know you’re an Animagus? Do they know you’re a wizard?”

“They’re much more relaxed about that here although it took me awhile to figure that out. Witches and wizards live among muggles although their traditions are quite a bit different from ours. It’s not viewed as anything unusual. The way they seem to view it is that some folks are gifted, others are not.”

Lupe walked back to them, this time with a young woman. She wore a uniform with the logo of what appeared to be a resort on the front pocket of her shirt. The woman grinned at Sirius. “Well, Perro, you don’t come see me unless you’ve got time to kill.” Hermione was pleased to hear a much clearer version of Spanish influenced English.

Sirius smiled at the new comer. “Hello, Juana. Congratulations on the job! When I left you had only just interviewed.” He ushered Hermione closer. “Juana this is my wife, Hermione.”

Juana accepted Hermione’s outstretched hand and gave Sirius a knowing grin. She whispered to Sirius so as not to embarrass Hermione. “She’s beautiful, Perro.” She turned her attention back to Sirius. “You look well.” She encouraged them to walk with her. “I want to hear all about the two of you.”

Sirius caught Juana by surprise, lifting her hand and smirking at her. “This is new.” He was referring to a gold band on Juana’s left hand.

Juana blushed but had a huge smile. “Jorge and I married just two months ago.” Sirius let her hand drop although the smirk stayed.

Lupe walked back to them, just before she reached them she turned and shouted to someone they couldn’t see. She directed them inside the small adobe house. She sat them down and offered them both a bottle of soda water. Juana patted Sirius on the hand. “You two shouldn’t drink the water here, you remember that right, Perro?”

Sirius groaned, he was remembering a particularly awful couple of days when he first arrived here. “I’ve never been so sick in all my life.”

A little man entered the house and cracked a huge smile when he saw Sirius. “Hey, Amigo!” He said in an equally thick Spanish accent. “¿En qué clase de apuro está usted esta vez, eh?” Sirius laughed

and then whispered to Hermione. "He wants to know what kind of trouble I'm in this time."

His eyes were mirthful and held real affection for Sirius. Sirius stood and embraced the much shorter man in a masculine hug. "¡Bueno, así es como funciona generalmente mi vida!" He grinned widely at his friend. "Pedro, ésta es mi esposa, Hermione."

"¡ Mimi; llámala Mimi!" Shouted Lupe from another room. Juana laughed lightly at the nickname, seeming to approve.

Pedro pulled a surprised Hermione into a hug. He stepped back to admire the young woman and then nudged Sirius in the side. "Linda muchacha, Perro." Hermione felt the warmth creep up her face as she blushed for the second time. He surveyed Sirius critically, "Se te ve bien."

"Gracias, Pedro. Me siento bien."

Sirius took time to translate for her, she listened intently to the words so she could make some sense of them as time went on. She spoke French quite well and was listening for the similarities.

Hermione and Sirius finished their sodas, talking amiably with their hosts. When they had finished Juana stood up to leave. "I'm not taking no for an answer this time, Perro. Your wife needs a roof over her head."

Sirius sobered from his friendly conversation with Pedro. "Thank you, Juana. That was the one thing I was really worried about."

"Well, come on," she said. "Let's get you settled in."

Sirius thanked Lupe and Pedro for their hospitality and followed Juana down a little gravelly path toward a larger home. She noticed green lizards in a variety of sizes darting in and out of the vegetation. Sirius leaned down and whispered, "Much better than rats."

Hermione giggled and was again reminded of him in her fourth year. He had thanked them for the chicken and bread they had brought praising its superiority over rats. "So, you didn't stay with her last time?" Queried Hermione.

"Oh, no," he replied with a grin. "I stayed in my Animagus form almost the whole time. I was careless one evening and got spotted by Juana. I got to know them in the weeks following that but I still hunted for my own food, not wanting to be a burden. Lupe and Pedro are quite poor, so was Juana at the time although she seems to be doing better for herself now."

Hermione observed Juana's home as they approached, her house appeared to be quite a bit larger than Lupe and Pedro's and there was an older, slightly beat up car parked along the unpaved road. Juana opened the door and invited them in. "Let me show you the bedroom, do you have anything with you?" She seemed to just notice their lack of baggage.

Sirius shook his head and explained what had happened to them, he gave Juana a brief description of the law regarding their marriage leaving out the personal details. Juana disappeared while Sirius and Hermione checked out the room she had ushered them into. The bed in the room was small, it looked like it would hold them but it wouldn't offer much room for moving around. There was a little table with a lamp beside the bed along with a small dresser. Juana returned with some clothes for each of them refusing to take no for answer. Sirius told Juana that the trip had tired them greatly and asked if she would mind if they took a nap.

"Of course. Make yourself at home. Like we say in my country 'Mi casa es su casa!'" Sirius and Hermione readily collapsed on the bed, they snuggled close together because they desired contact and because the bed was very small. They'd had a rough, emotionally and physically draining couple of days. They fell into a deep sleep not waking until early afternoon the next day. They ventured out of the bedroom together and made their way into the kitchen. Juana was talking with a gentleman who looked to be a few years younger than

Sirius. He was wearing a uniform that read Agencia Federal de la Investigación.

When the man caught sight of Sirius his face broke out into a grin. “¡Pendejo¿Cómo te ha ido?”

They grasped each other in a manly hug.

“Damn, it’s good to see you!” Said Sirius, his smiling face professing the close friendship he shared with this man.

“Oh, and who’s this?” Said the man with an appreciative eye and tone of voice, his Spanish accent was slightly thicker than Juana’s and it lent a seductive quality.

Hermione heard something she had only heard one other time although she had been certain then that she was hearing things. Now she was not so sure. Deep from somewhere within Sirius came a low but distinct growl. Juana smacked the man playfully on the arm. “¡Cabrón!”

Sirius glared at his friend, a little playfully, a little not. “This is my wife,” he said with special emphasis on the last word. “Hermione this is Jorge Arroyo, Juana’s husband. Jorge this is Hermione.”

“Were calling here Mimi,” said Juana definitively.

With a mischievous grin at his friend he decided to push his luck just a little. Jorge picked up Hermione’s hand and kissed it in a gentlemanly gesture. “Pero qué cosa más linda. Aren’t you a pretty little thing. Mimi was it?”

Hermione couldn’t suppress the smile although she cast a wary look at her husband who was trying to humor his friend’s deliberate goad. Juana intervened on the slight pissing contest and announced that lunch was ready.

Juana placed a steaming pot on a rough, wooden table and laid out spoons and bowls, they all sat down around the table. Hermione filled

herself on the delicious fish soup Juana had prepared, after lunch Sirius wandered off with Jorge and left Hermione to make friends with Juana.

“So, when did you meet our Perro?”

“Just before he came here to you.”

“Oh, he never mentioned a young senorita.”

“Well, I was only thirteen when we met.” Juana’s eyes went up in surprise.

She peaked out the door to see Sirius laughing with his friend, sharing a beer. He looked relaxed and happy. She let out a little sigh. He was so handsome, so very good to look at.

Juana smiled at her, “Young love is a beautiful thing. I’m that way with my Jorge.”

Hermione quickly shook her head, “It’s not like that. I had to marry him, it was arranged, sort of a marriage of convenience. He doesn’t love me but he takes very good care of me.”

Juana regarded Hermione thoughtfully for a moment. “Well, if it’s a marriage of convenience then it’s very convenient that you’re in love with him. No?” Juana pointed to Sirius.

“No. I’m really not.” Hermione decided to change the topic of conversation. “Is there a town close by where we can exchange currency and maybe buy some clothes?”

“Pedro can take you in tomorrow, the closest town is Tapachula on the border.” Juana stood up and walked over to the sink and started to wash dishes.

Hermione smiled and started to help out, she flicked her wand and the table began to clear itself. Juana stood back from the sink.

"You're much better at that than Perro." Hermione flicked her wand a few more times and the whole kitchen went to work.

Sirius poked his head inside the door and smiled at Hermione, "It's too bad we don't have bathing suits, it's a beautiful day out."

Juana piped up, "Mimi, you can borrow one of mine."

Hermione shook her head but Juana wasn't taking no for an answer, she grabbed Hermione's hand and led her to the bedroom she shared with her husband. Juana dumped a drawer full of bikinis on the bed and invited Hermione to pick out whichever one she wanted. Hermone had hoped for a nice, conservative one piece but Juana didn't own one. She held each one up to her body but they all made her feel completely exposed, like she was parading about in her underwear. She picked the most modest one she could find. Sensing her nervousness Juana gave her a wrap and a large towel.

Hermione insisted they slip past the guys to the beach which wasn't that far away. They were noticed immediately but seemed oblivious to the hungry eyes caressing their near naked forms.

Jorge excused himself for a moment and slipped back into the house. Sirius sipped his beer and watched his young wife cavort about in the ocean waves. She crept into his heart like the dawn through a bedroom window, fresh and new casting light in a darkened room. He barely recognized himself anymore, he felt free and light and dammit, young when he was with her.

She had asked him what they would do when the law was repealed and he knew what his heart wanted. He wanted to hold onto her and never let her go. His head told him that he would have to, that she was never meant to be his. Before the marriage law she had her eyes on Ron Weasley, the runt. They would never have looked to each other and that fact alone stood out to him.

He knew he could convince her to stay with him, he had opened doors for her the way only an older man could have. He saw the look in her eye, the way she watched him and made excuses to spend time alone with him. He even knew that she might be falling for him.

She was young and guileless, completely untrained in the ways to hide your heart from those who would view it. Still, he wouldn't use their unfortunate situation against her to trap her in his life. When the time came he was resolved to release her so she could get back to the life that had been briefly derailed.

Sirius sighed and took another sip of his beer and wondered if she had figured out his deeper feelings for her. He didn't think so and wanted to keep it that way.

"Hey, Perro!" Called Jorge from the house. Sirius turned to see what his friend was hollering about. Jorge was holding up two pairs of mens swimming trunks. Sirius grinned and struck out to the house at a trot. He and Jorge quickly changed and joined the girls in the water.

Hermione immediately fled to the deeper waters, desiring to keep her body from the illuminating rays of the sun. Sirius rolled his eyes and reached her easily, under the waves that kept her body hidden he touched and tickled whatever pleased him to do so while he sucked and gently bit the skin on her neck. They played and flirted the afternoon away, she was glad for some time to relax and have fun. She was so distracted by Sirius that she didn't notice that Jorge and Juana had retreated to the privacy of their home.

Sirius eagerly took the opportunity their hosts absence provided. His fingers easily found their way into bottom half of her bikini. He played liberally with her sensitive button, while his other hand played with a breast. She grasped onto his shoulders for support because she was certain she couldn't stand and swimming would take her away from the pleasure he was delivering. She stood with her legs spread so he could have free access to her sex. Sirius chuckled at her eager response and the way she begged him for release so he quickly inserted two fingers. She whimpered to him how good it felt, after all they had been through she needed this.

He suddenly decided to change tactics and picked her and laid her down on the beach just shy of where the ocean waves could reach them. The afternoon waned as the sun set in the western sky, a blood orange ball that met with the cool blue ocean. The warm sand kissed her back while her husband ravaged her body. He entered her

smoothly and set a languid rhythm, whispering to her how good she felt and how beautiful she was. He made love to her, desperate to tell her how he felt but not daring to, fearing the consequences for her. He chose to love her during his brief time with her, to enjoy her now. He told her silently with each stroke the depth of his feelings, how he needed her, what he wouldn't do for her.

Hermione sensed the difference in him, she saw the intensity in his face, felt it in her body. It was powerful and overwhelming and even a little frightening. When they were through and their bodies lay spent on the warm sand she recalled something. He was holding something back, she wondered what it was and she wondered why.

[illegible]

A/N: Thank you for the reviews!

Special Recognition: Gueneviere- Thank you so much for help with the Spanish!

Fastfashiondispatch- My much appreciated Beta.

I'm in the middle of a new chapter of *Sacrifice*, my muse has been sleepy and occasionally unconscious.

Some of you had misgivings about Mexico so let me explain. Sirius traveled to a tropical local at the end of the third book and returned from there in the fourth. The only indication JKR gave as to where he traveled to was by the tropical bird Sirius sent his letter to Harry with. That portion of Southern Mexico would indeed be warm and tropical, I have no idea if there are actually resorts in that area but it makes sense to me that there could be. I think that the idea of running to a place infamous for muggle outlaws would appeal to Sirius so I took some liberty.

As far as Apparating goes I haven't been able to find anything in the books that would prohibit such a long trip. I did look by the way: 'Destination. Determination. Deliberation.' Wilkie Twycross said, '...keep your mind firmly upon the desired destination...' and then

‘...focus your determination to occupy the visualized space!’ The last of his instructions were ‘...Turn on the spot, feeling your way into nothingness, moving with deliberation.’ So, Sirius knew precisely where the cottages in Austria were and the village in Mexico, he should have had no problem with the visualization. He is certainly a determined individual the only thing I think he may have had a problem with is deliberation. He is not the most careful or cautious of people, I can see the arrogant pureblood taking his ability to handle such a long trip completely for granted. There is nothing to suggest that a long trip was impossible but it could have been physically taxing the way that producing a patronus was for Harry (at least while he was learning). So, I let him make the trip but it took something out of both of them.

I think I may have broken the rules by allowing him to Apparate with an unconscious Hermione, I didn’t think about that until I researched Apparition to answer pstibbons question about distances. Children can’t Apparate with adults as evidenced in the trip to the Tri-Wizard tournament although Harry was able to Apparate a weak and dying Dumbledore back to Hogsmeade just before his death. The books never deal clearly (that I have found or can remember, please correct me if I am wrong) with the unconscious so...if I broke the rules I’m sorry, I really didn’t mean to.

Sirius was just being sneaky with Snape, I sort of wanted to leave it up to your imagination. Snape was jinxed by Sirius to pick Hermione if she raised her hand. That’s why he’s struggling against it, sorry I wasn’t clearer on that.

By the way I turn (incoherently mumbles a number) this month so yay for me! I love birthdays and just ignore the number.

Retreat

The filtered light of the morning sun shone down on their sweaty bodies. Sirius posed Hermione, one leg behind to support, the other just in front, bent at a slight angle. He positioned her arms and then assumed her same pose. He caught her eye and walked deliberately and slowly through a motion and paused for her to follow suit. She did it perfectly and was pleased with his approving smile.

“The key is to know it so well that its second nature. I don’t know why they don’t teach this anymore. It can be the difference between ducking a curse and scrrrchh” He motioned a line across his throat.

“I’ve read all about this! I think it’s fascinating! Professor Lockheart started a dueling club in our second year but he focused on spells not on the martial art itself.” She loved turning theory into the practical.

Sirius snorted. “I went to school with that idiot. Completely infatuated with himself, he was and hopeless at dueling.”

Hermione colored brightly, it didn’t go unnoticed by Sirius. He grinned and rolled his eyes. “Don’t tell me you fancied him?” Her inability to answer or meet his eyes encouraged him to press on. “Oh, Professor Lockheart!” He said in high falsetto with a dramatic hand to the forehead and a feigned swoon.

Annoyed, she took his unguarded stance into account and flicked her wand at him.

“Hey!” He said laughing, “Ow...that hurt!” He dropped the subject but was still rather pleased with himself, even with her well placed hex.

She didn’t trouble herself to look guilty, she met his gaze evenly with a triumphant grin. She resumed their conversation before his mock of her. “I ran across this martial art while preparing for the dueling club. I showed it to Harry during our fifth year but no one had any experience with it so he focused on wand work.”

“Do you think he’d like to learn?” Sirius’ expression was hopeful, his tone uncertain.

“Oh, yes! He’d love to!” He brightened to expectant anticipation at her words.

They had been starting their mornings like this for the last week. It had started when Hermione posed a question about their return. They both suspected that the war might be raging at home and neither liked sitting it out on the sidelines. They agreed that if they could find out for certain they would leave for home immediately. He knew he would feel a lot better if she were more prepared so they used their time to prepare for battle.

“Let’s try another one, this is the last of the five basic moves I want you to learn.” He stood in front of her and performed another simple move.

Hermione copied his movement with his help and then together they practiced for about thirty minutes, running through everything he had shown her. Deciding to take a break he conjured two glasses, left them hanging in the air and then poured water from his wand into them. He handed her a glass and took one for himself. She greedily drank the cool liquid down and then vanished the glass.

“So, when do we put it together?”

“What? You mean with wands?”

“Yes! Of course, with wands!”

“Well...” A slow grin began to spread across his face. They could keep it to silly jinxes and hexes. Hermione didn’t catch his look of mischief.

“Oh, come on. Don’t start treating me like a child now.”

“I wouldn’t dream of it.” With dramatic flair he swept her off her feet and gave her a quick, playful kiss. “You do realize you will be going

up against the Sirius Black. Could get you into trouble, little girl.” He dropped his voice rather low and slightly sinister. He spoke with mock seriousness and gave her a roguish wink.

“Oh, I think you’ll find me a match for him.” She spoke crisply while still playful. He raised his eyebrows at her possible double meaning. Did she suspect what was in his heart? He doubted it.

“Indeed I do.” His deep baritone hovered above a whisper. He held her eyes for a long moment. Their interchange had turned from playful to emotionally charged as he was wearing his heart on his sleeve of late. He chided himself and schooled his features to something more playful, leaving Hermione feeling confused as to what had just happened.

“Sirius?”

He ignored her query. “Now,” he said smartly, deciding to pretend he hadn’t royally slipped up. “Don’t bother with any of that bowing nonsense. In a real battle no one is going to bow to you.” He assumed a starting position and waited, she stood staring at him.

“Sirius, what was that?”

“What?”

“That!”

“Hermione, I’m sure I don’t know what you’re talking about.” He lied convincingly, relying on arrogance. “Do you want to duel or not?” He feigned irritation and she bought it.

“Yes. Of, course.” She said with hesitancy and then stronger. “Of, course I do.” Hermione took a stand across from him. “No bowing, was it?”

“Not in the situations we’re likely to find ourselves in.” He said gravely.

“So, who goes first?”

“Whoever’s quicker.” He said, with a sly grin, twirling his wand.

Hermione clearly didn’t understand that the game was on because she took her time pulling her wand out of her shorts. She felt the force of the spell hit her but she had no idea what had happened to her. She looked up to see a rather smug Sirius. “I wasn’t ready.”

“Clearly.”

“What did you do?” She felt herself over, when she reached her hair she took in a sudden, sharp breath of air. “You didn’t!” she whispered.

“It’s not frizzy,” he said casually.

“I feel like a poodle!”

“Well, you do sort of resemble...” Her glare paused him in mid sentence. ‘Too far?’ he wondered to himself. “Finite.” Her hair fell down around her face. “You know,” he started, “your opponent most likely won’t wait for you to pull your wand.”

Hermione pulled herself up, wand firmly in hand, face set in determination. She took a stance and he followed suit. She flicked her wand, he blocked. He flicked his wand, she blocked. They danced around each other for a quarter of an hour getting nowhere. He took her slowly, building her confidence. He was genuinely impressed with her reflexes, she understood how to incorporate what he taught her over the last week with the spell work she already knew. Hermione flicked her wand once and then again and then used one of Sirius’ moves to avoid his return. Sirius blocked the first spell she sent but not the second. He grew a beard down to his feet where it curled lightly around his toes. He got tangled up in it and fell lightly to the ground. Hermione looked mighty smug.

Sirius laughed at himself as he tried to pull acres of long black hair out of his feet and legs. He finally gave up, severed it and then

vanished the excess still leaving him a considerable beard. "You know," he said pointing to his face, "All you had to do was ask."

Hermione put out her hand to help him up, he took it and once he was on his feet he pulled her into a quick, furry kiss. The hair on his face felt odd to her, she was reminded more of his Animagus form and less of him. "I think I like your stubble a good bit more."

"Your fault, you know." He made a big show of preening his beard for her amusement. She laughed and then offered to braid it. He feigned mock offense, proclaiming that sort of thing was far too girly for him. They walked toward the house laughing about his new look, their training session apparently over.

They continued their routine by having lunch, their hosts were both at work so they had been left alone. After they ate Sirius told her he was going to wander about so she went and took a shower. They had found out early on in the week that they got along much better if they had a little time away from each other.

Earlier in the week

Sirius had hung around after their first training session, feeling bad about wanting to stretch his legs a little. It would mean leaving Hermione alone in a strange house in a strange country. So he sat listening to her drone on about something, he had quit paying attention ten minutes earlier. He understood the connections she was making being a rather clever wizard himself but this just wasn't how he worked. He used the theory alright but his genius lay in the fun of trial and error. She was frantic to get in touch with home, as was he. She had an idea about a way to communicate without the use of a patronus or an owl. He had done his fair amount of research in school but she, well she was just scary. He was certain she had never read a book that she hadn't memorized. She was worse than Remus.

Suddenly he realized he couldn't take another minute. He stood swiftly and mumbled something about needing to move around. Hermione was surprised by the abruptness of his departure. She looked up to see him dart out the door. Her face contorted in a little frown and narrowed eyes. She wasn't sure what she expected from

him but she had hoped he would take the situation a little more seriously. She was tempted to demand that he come back and try and make himself useful.

Hermione stared at the space he had occupied only moments ago. She sat thinking, her quill tapping out an incessant beat on the parchment. Juana and Jorge had already left for work and now Sirius was off Merlin knows where. She had learned through observation that when Sirius was upset or nervous he couldn't sit still for very long. He would suck it up when it really counted but apparently now wasn't one of those times. She let out an irritated huff. There was nothing they could do for the time being but sit and wait. They should be working together, using the time to their advantage.

Hermione decided to take a break and see what Sirius was up to. She was still irritated that he had just run out like that. She left the Arroyo's home and let herself wander down the unpaved road. She didn't have long to look. She heard the sounds of a happy group of children interlaced with the barking of a dog. Hermione smiled and wondered if Sirius was the reason for the delighted sounds. She continued down the little path toward the sound, her eyes trained ahead. She wasn't disappointed, gamboling around the legs of a dozen school aged boys was a shaggy black dog, tongue lolling out the side of his mouth. He paused to sniff the wind and then looked in her direction. He started towards her, changing back into a man in midstride.

Sirius waved to the children even as they were proclaiming their disappointment.

"¡Vuelve, Perro!"

"¡No te vayas todavía!"

She caught a glimpse of his face. From a distance he looked aggravated. She watched as he pulled it into a blank expressionless mask. Now she was certain he had looked aggravated. She couldn't believe the nerve of him, did he expect her to figure it all out by herself? She had been watching his face as he approached, she had

seen him hold back anger, the control he was exerting reminded her of that.

“Are you alright? Did something happen?” His face looked a little tight and his tone was falsely even.

“What? No, Sirius I need you to come back so we can put our heads together and...”

“Hermione, I need a break from that.” There were other reasons he took some time away from her. They had never spent this much time completely alone. She’d always had another distraction or insecurity that had softened her usual personality. He was reminded of what a bossy know-it-all she really was. As she had droned on he noticed that there was something annoying about her delivery. She ran through the information with a particular air, as though she really didn’t expect him to catch on. He was rather offended by that.

“Don’t you care about getting home or do you just want to play about in paradise?”

He had lost his temper with her then. They had gotten into a magnificent row that ended with him storming off and her crying alone. There was more to his problem than just Hermione. He had made a promise to a friend and right now he felt like he was breaking that promise. Listening to Hermione fret her way through to a solution only served to highlight the fact that he was a world away from being useful to Harry. As he’d sat and listened half heartedly he felt a growing resentment toward her. It wasn’t her fault but she was the only reason he was there and not with Harry. He couldn’t dwell on this so instead he walked about.

When they made up they talked about ways to manage their time together. They had gone for a walk together along the edge of the jungle. Each of them more reasonable with the irritation out of the way. He agreed to help her with the spell, his way and she agreed to let him have some time to do as he pleased. The make up sex had been phenomenal. Not being able to wait to get home he lifted her up and fucked up against a tree.

Back to the present

Trying to solve a problem usually evened her out but now that he'd left she found she couldn't focus. It had been like this every day. She lost herself in thought, obsessing over every detail of the last week. Normally she was perfectly happy with her thoughts to keep her company, even welcomed the solitude. Her life made so little sense at the current point in time, she was doing what she could to create order out of the chaos. Try as she might, she couldn't train her thoughts to focus on a solution. Now that he was gone thoughts of him kept intruding, little changes she had noticed over the past two weeks. Something had changed with their near constant contact.

Hermione sighed heavily, frustrated with herself for having succumbed once again. She resolutely pushed him out of her head and focused on the situation. She couldn't help but believe that their friends had no idea what had happened to them. Sirius had expressed misgivings about whether or not a patronus would hold its strength from as far away as Germany. He was positive it wouldn't survive a transatlantic trip. Neither of them were willing to risk using a bird, if it were intercepted it could be used to track them on a return trip. So the question plaguing Hermione was how to communicate with home.

She worried about the fate of Harry, Ron and the Order. If Sirius was right the ministry was under the thumb of Voldemort and Azkaban no longer offered its protection from the worst of the wizarding world. What was life at Hogwarts like right now? Was Dumbledore still in charge of his school? What about muggleborn witches and wizards, how were they faring?

Hermione let out another long sigh. She felt guilty hidden away in their own little corner of paradise. She rubbed her temples against the ache in her head. She felt a little lost without her books to read or classes to attend. Their most pressing issue was survival which sounded exciting but was at the moment, a little boring. She decided to ask him next she saw him whether or not he had any ties to the wizard community in Mexico or Guatemala. The way he described it she wondered if there even was a separate community. She

marveled at the idea of an integrated society, terms like muggle and pureblood would be meaningless.

Hermione had a few ideas but it was all theory, things she had pieced together, things she had run across while researching for something else. She kept having to fight the impulse to look something up, look it up where exactly?

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Sirius returned from his walk. He went looking for Hermione, finding her on the back porch. He stood hidden from her, watching her, fantasizing that what had her so captivated was him. He had thought about her on his walk, he was beginning to doubt his ability to let her go. The emotion he was grappling with was new to him, he had never experienced anything like it. He had a big heart and loved his friends fiercely but he had never been in love before. When he thought about her with someone else he felt murderous. She was sitting on the porch, romantically draped across the steps, her head leaning against a post. He heard her sigh and decided to check on her. He walked noiselessly along the porch and sat down beside her. She jumped a little at seeing him but was glad for his company.

“What were you thinking about just now?” He pushed a fallen tendril out of her eyes.

She touched his face, smiling at his lack of facial hair. She looked at him for a moment, deciding something. She was no coward and this felt important to her. “You and me.” She believed with her whole heart that the war was indeed raging at home. She also believed the light would win out over the dark. When the light won the marriage law would be repealed. She wanted to talk about what they would do.

He sat down, holding his breath. “What about you and me?”

“I think we need to talk about what we’ll do when this law is repealed, because it will be. I’m sure of that.” She had thought quite a lot about how she would feel if he was no longer hers.

“You’ve had very little in the way of options, what do you want to do?” His chest felt tight, he had just placed his heart in her hand.

She didn’t want to answer that question, not yet. She was hoping to feel him out. “You’re different this week, something is different.” She didn’t want to come straight out and tell him how she felt without some clue as to where she stood with him.

Shit! Nice one, Padfoot. Heart on your sleeve, much?

“You think so?” He said, making an attempt at casual.

“And you keep doing that.” She said with a little frown.

“Doing what?”

“Being deliberately evasive.”

He was quiet for a few moments finding the distant ocean very, very interesting. He could keep her. He knew he could and he wanted to, desperately. He felt that it would be wrong and that anything she may be feeling for him was false because it wouldn’t have happened naturally. The whole situation was forced, their lives manipulated into this. Did he really want her like this? A part of him didn’t care how he’d gotten her but his nobler side cared quite a lot.

“Sirius?”

“You and I,” he said motioning a finger between them. “We weren’t meant to be. You would have gotten together with Ron and I, well I…”

“Would have continued to be a playboy?” She supplied.

He stood up and walked around, silently cursing Molly and her mouth. “I just never found that special someone.”

“Am I special to you?” Her voice was small and soft and held just a hint of a waver.

Sirius just stared at her for a moment and then walked off. He couldn't do this, he had to get away, get some air, some room to breath. He just left her there, sitting on the porch in bewilderment and no closer to understanding. She couldn't believe he'd just walked off. As she watched him leave she resolved to put her mind on the case and began to analyze all the differences she had noticed in him and examined her feelings in relation to it all.

[illegible]

A/N: Thank you for the reviews!

Thanks again to Gueneviere for the translations. It is much appreciated.

Thanks to Fastfashiondispatch my wonderful Beta.

For the record, my birthday is on the 17th but I celebrate the whole month hence only revealing the month at the start.

Let me apologize once more for the atrocious translations. I discovered that you can fix a chapter without losing the reviews so bully for me!

Glad you liked Mimi, I thought it was cute.

Sigh. I knew Hermione's birthday was in September but spaced on the date. I really thought it was at the end of the month and relied on my memory. Please forgive me my error. Obviously this fic is AU but I like to follow the basics.

This fic is told from the points of view of Hermione and Sirius. You got to see what goes on in the Order meetings because Sirius is in the room. Since they don't know what is going on back home, neither do we. Sorry, we'll just have to wait until (if/when) they return.

I'm not revealing any important information in the Spanish, its just greetings and how are you and the like. The children said "Come back, Perro!" and "Don't leave yet!"

I really enjoy reading fanfiction, my favorite pairing is Sirius/Hermione (obviously). I have never seen him as a drunken lunatic either. Drunk on occasion? Sure. Dark and brooding sometimes? Absolutely. Crazy? Erm...not in my estimation. I have wondered if he might be bipolar. It would explain why he is so up (couple that with poor decisions like telling Snape he could see what Remus was up to by going to the Whomping Willow) sometimes and so down at others. Of course he had a set of horrible circumstances which can easily explain the down but I've wondered just the same.

PLEASE REVIEW!

Search

Pedro Sandoval stepped out of the small, abused pickup truck and picked his way up the path to the Arroyo's home. The sky was still dark, the dawn only beginning to break in the East. He knocked on the back door and was invited in by a smiling Juana. "¡Buenos días, Pedro!"

Pedro smiled warmly at her greeting. "¡Buenos días! " Juana gestured to Pedro that he should come in. "Perro! Pedro is here!" She called gaily to Sirius while setting a cup of coffee in front of Pedro.

Sirius walked in looking tired and a little haggard. Although their hosts didn't know what was going on between Sirius and Hermione they did notice the change in his behavior. He treated her with respect as always but he wasn't as warm with her, he was more business like in his interaction. It was with pride that Juana noted Hermione wasn't letting it get to her. Hermione had been working on something all week and it seemed to consume her.

Hermione walked in a few minutes later positively quivering with excitement. Pedro was taking them to the town of Tapachula which borders on Mexico and Guatemala. She was going to call her parents while in town and take a look around. Sirius wanted to exchange some currency at an obscure bank that catered to wizards as well as muggles. He hadn't been to the town on his last trip and couldn't apparate them in. Hermione took a seat next to Sirius and sipped her coffee, smiling at what a wonderful day it was going to be.

Pedro and Sirius chatted while Juana told her some of the places she needed to see while in Tapachula. There was a cathedral and a temple in addition to the market square. Tapachula was important to agriculture as well as home to many skilled artisans, the city boasted a thriving market. She was ready to drink it all in, after two weeks stuck in the little village she was terribly bored.

Pedro and the Blacks drank their coffee and ate breakfast quickly. Pedro had managed to get a ride into the city. Their ride was waiting patiently out front. They bid their farewell to Juana and walked the short distance to the truck. Sirius greeted and thanked the driver, the

man was someone Sirius had never met but was a good friend of Pedro's. Sirius and Hermione climbed into the bed of the truck and they were off on the bouncy, bumpy ride to Tapachula.

They had about thirty miles to travel which passed in a blur of deep green vegetation. The long coastline was to their back, the jungle in front seemed unending. For what seemed like the fifteenth time Hermione was bounced up and into Sirius' lap. This wouldn't have been a problem normally except that he was being a bit prickly with her. She had a million questions to ask but felt stifled by his demeanor. He had been distant and withdrawn since she had asked him what she meant to him. When she wasn't obsessing on a way to communicate with Dumbledore she was consumed with figuring out the mystery that was Sirius Black.

The sound from the truck prohibited any sort of conversation that didn't involve screaming at the top of their lungs so they sat with a gulf of unspoken emotion between them. Hermione was so relieved when the jungle began to give way to a smattering of small houses. They were traveling at a lower rate of speed as they neared the city. She was charmed by little snapshots of life in Southern Mexico.

They pulled into Tapachula and found a place to park. With the truck finally at a stop Hermione and Sirius scrambled out and thanked the driver. They agreed on a time to return and headed off. Hermione couldn't tell which vendor she wanted to visit first. She had to curb the impulse to leave her dark cloud to his own devices and simply explore on her own. Sirius grabbed her by the hand and made a beeline for the bank. He wanted to get this little excursion over as quickly as possible despite her protestations.

They entered the bank and were dismayed at the long lines. They had to wait for what seemed like an eternity. It seemed that each customer couldn't simply transact their business and be on their way. Whether it was a middle aged woman who was friends with the teller or an older gentleman who seemed very upset about something each transaction dragged on endlessly. The minutes ticked away at an agonizing pace. Hermione looked longingly out the bank window at the life that was teeming mere feet away. There was so much to see and do and she was stuck in a line with a grumpy Sirius.

Once they had finally concluded their business they left the bank, Hermione tried to take closer look at one of the vendors. Sirius had other ideas, the next item on his agenda was for Hermione to call home. Hermione let out a frustrated groan when she saw that the telephone booth had a line of its own. She glanced up occasionally to note the suns position in the sky. They had been in the line for an hour and there were still three people ahead of them, not counting the young mother currently in the booth.

Two women and one man later they finally got into the booth. Hermione placed the collect call to England and waited. She was worried she had caught them at a bad time but after the fourth ring her father picked up the phone. She could hear the worry and strain in his voice as he accepted the charges.

“Hermione!” She could hear the relief in his voice. “We’ve been beside ourselves with worry.” She could tell by his voice that her father was close to tears.

“I’m safe Daddy,” she soothed over the crackling line. “Sirius is keeping me safe.”

“Darling, we can’t speak long. Your Headmaster said if you were to call to keep it brief.” Her father spoke hurriedly.

“What else did he say, Daddy?” Her voice carried a note of anxiety that was picked up by Sirius. He was watching her intently.

“He said you were to stay put and that he would contact you when it was safe to return. He also said you were in the safest hands possible. You will thank Sirius for us won’t you?” Her father’s voice cracked at the last sentence.

She flicked her eyes up at Sirius and smiled at him. He raised an eyebrow in question and looked like he wanted ask a question. “I’ll tell him Daddy. Do you have any news from Hogwarts?”

“Honey, you have to get off the line. Know that we love you.” The line went dead. Hermione slowly hung the phone up.

Sirius pulled her off to the side. “Well? What were you supposed to tell me?”

“My parents said to tell you thank you for keeping me safe.” Sirius grinned with a rather pleased smile, his introduction to her parents had weighed heavily on his mind. “Dumbledore told them I was in safe hands with you.” She paused before telling him what worried her the most. “My dad said we couldn’t stay on the line for very long.”

“Well, of course not. The ministry has the ability to monitor phones.” He waved his hand impatiently as if that was obvious.

“Do you think that was long enough for them to find out where we are?” She looked at Sirius with wide, worried eyes.

Sirius shook his head and smiled reassuringly. “Did Dumbledore say anything else?” Sirius was cautiously hopeful. He was bored as well. He’d had the freedom to roam where he pleased on his last stay. Being stuck in one location without much to do was starting to wear on him.

Hermione sighed before speaking, he wasn’t going to be pleased with the information. She wasn’t thrilled with it herself. “Yes. He said to stay put and that he would get in touch with us.”

Sirius groaned loudly, even more frustrated than before. Without thinking about it he draped an arm around Hermione possessively, taking some solace in the fact they were in it together. “Figures,” he muttered darkly.

She could feel his mood darken, she tried to brighten him up by getting him to show her around the town. He was very lack luster about the whole affair. He walked her past the San Agustin Cathedral and the Buena Esperanza Temple muttering a few words about each. Then they took a turn around the market, he seemed to be placating

her making her feel uncomfortable about really exploring all the market had to offer.

When they reached the part of the market they had arrived at Hermione looked up to see Pedro and his friend waiting by the truck. Pedro waved when he saw them, Hermione smiled her return. Sirius nodded to Pedro and steered them towards the truck.

“Sorry we couldn’t stay longer,” he said without conviction.

“It’s alright. At least we managed some sort of communication with the Order.” Hermione was resolved to begin testing out some of her theories.

They climbed into the back into the truck, Sirius pulled her against him. The truck ride back was just as bumpy but with Sirius’ arms holding her steady so she didn’t go flying about. The truck was still loud, the ride was still long but it was better because some of the ice Sirius had erected between them was melting.

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Hermione sat at the kitchen table in the Arroyo’s home drinking a cup of coffee. Sirius had wandered off and the Arroyo’s were at work. She set out to focus on the spell but her thoughts drifted back to Sirius. Her week had been consumed with thoughts of him. He wanted her to think about what she wanted. So she weighed the options, all two of them. It was a simple either or question but that was where the simplicity ended. There was a something worrisome at the edge of her subconscious. Not so much a thought as it was a feeling. Every time she thought she was closing in it slipped away.

Hermione groaned in frustration. She was staring blankly at the reams of notes, things she pulled out of her memory from past research. Even as she read over her work her traitorous mind returned to Sirius. She wanted the notes organized to show what her thought process had been. Later on he would look over the notes and then they would talk about what they were trying to accomplish.

She took a deep breath and emptied her mind of Sirius and began sorting through her notes. Hermione stumbled across something about golems. Golems were animated creatures made from inanimate materials. Dark Magic used the concept of golems to create inferi but that was not where the idea originated. She mused to herself that inferi were probably the reason that golems had gone out of vogue. It was an obscure branch of transfiguration that was practically unheard of anymore.

She ran across the information researching for Professor McGonagall's class. She was interested in finding a way to use a golem to send a message. If they could get a golem to Dumbledore it would deliver their message and could bring one back in return. Golems had real possibility she decided. She wondered what Sirius would think. She loved presenting him with ideas and then debating with him. She was surprised at how agile his mind was, true brilliance lay dormant until he got off on a tangent.

She was worried about him, he reminded her of the man who had to hide in his childhood home. She felt like he had been building to his current state of depression. No words were exchanged about what had transpired on the back porch the week before. When he returned he had needed her urgently, he was rough and demanding with her body. He held her tightly afterwards and wouldn't let her say a word. He just held her, in the dark, in silence. Something was different with him and she couldn't figure what it was.

Hermione had trouble sorting out what had changed. Everything they did was laced with sex and flirtation making it difficult for her to sift through. She tried to focus only on those moments that were super charged. Her analytical and logical mind picked through the evidence in an attempt to piece it together into something coherent. She let her mind drift back over the last several weeks until she saw something that stood out. Her mind played over her stay at Grimmauld. They were in the sitting room talking about their day around London. There had been a moment, a brief one to be sure. There was something about the way he looked at her, something new and unfamiliar. It was intense, she'd felt captured by his pale grey eyes.

The conversation that started with that day around London had turned to their relationship. They discussed the changes between them. He admitted that things had not started off easy for him but that he thought it was good now, the way they were with each other. He hadn't defined it beyond saying that it was good. That was the day she first asked about what they would do when the marriage law was repealed. For some reason he hadn't wanted to talk about it even though it would have been logical to do so. Why on earth didn't he want to speak about it?

Her mind drifted further along the following weeks. He had been very displeased with her for not sharing with him about Malfoy's abuse of her. That was to be expected though, she had known that if he found out she would have to face his anger. She went carefully over everything he said to her until she got to the moment on the couch in her dormitory. There was that look in his eyes again. It was consuming, passionate and something more. Possessive? That's what she'd thought at the time.

The day after that their world had gone to hell. It was a blur of panic and fear. Everything had happened at an alarming pace from reviving at the Burrow to landing in Germany and then traveling to Mexico. She pictured the faces of all the new people until she landed on one, Jorge Arroyo. Sirius had not been pleased about something. At the time she wondered if he was feeling jealous. Jealousy?

She saw the look once again during their first duel, very briefly but by now unmistakable. "I think you'll find me a match for him." That's what she had said. She played it over again and then murmured thoughtfully those words he said right after that. "Indeed I do." Indeed I do what? Indeed I do think you will be a good dueling partner? That's what she thought he meant but those words didn't match the electric feeling he was sending her way. Indeed I do think you'll be a good match for me? "A good match...a good match." She said the words slowly and carefully, hoping for a spark of insight at hearing the words said out loud.

Then there was that moment on the beach. How could she have forgotten that? "Oh," she gasped remembering the intensity of it. A cold tickle shot down her spine followed by a rush of warmth in her

lower torso. She had felt overpowered by the moment, helplessly swept away in his emotion. “Ohhh,” she said again, this time with understanding, it was all coming together.

All this led up to their confrontation on the back porch last week. She pondered over all the events of the last few weeks, it was a confusing puzzle but she felt she was closer to figuring it out. She had been honest and told him she was thinking of them and what it meant, where it was leading. “Evasive.” She muttered thinking about how he tried to push the decision back on her. Did he want her to make a decision?

He’d said they weren’t meant to be and said something about Ron and herself. “Well, sod that!” Who cares about what might have been? Her feelings for Ron were a distant memory now. What did he want? “What does he want?” She said out loud, like hearing the words would bring her the answer. He said he’d never found that special someone. Then she had asked if she was special to him after which he abruptly walked away.

“Well either he doesn’t want to keep the marriage together and doesn’t know how to tell me or...” Hermione felt dizzy, it all made sense. “It’s either that or he’s in love with me.” Sirius Black in love with her? Was that really possible?

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Jorge and Sirius were standing outside by a smoking grill, sharing a beer and laughing. His mood appeared to have improved and it pleased Hermione. She and Juana were inside cutting vegetables and making dinner preparations. Juana peeked out the kitchen window and then banged on it. Jorge looked over his shoulder and waved her off like he was shooing a fly.

“He’s going to burn it again! Ever since he bought that grill all I ever eat is burnt meat!” Hermione assumed that Juana was joking because she was laughing even as she spoke.

“Maybe Sirius could help,” offered Hermione, trying to be helpful. With a flick of her wand a knife went to work on carrots and another on tomatoes.

“Oh, he wouldn’t do that to Jorge!” Juana scolded lightly, looking over her shoulder and flashing a small grin. She turned back to her work, stirring a pot full of rice and adding some vegetables.

Hermione looked puzzled. “Do what to Jorge?”

Juana smiled, “It’s a man thing.”

“Oh,” said Hermione, still puzzled.

Juana didn’t offer anymore on the subject, she whisked about the kitchen gathering up plates, forks and knives to take outside. She set everything out at a little picnic table and then returned inside to continue cooking. Hermione waved her wand a few times, setting the kitchen into motion.

Once Hermione was satisfied that Juana had everything under control she directed her focus back to the spell. She was irritated that she had once again allowed thoughts of Sirius to dominate her mind. There was so much to consider, she was contemplating something new for her without the safety net of school and one of the most complete libraries in the wizarding world. It was exciting to her. She and Sirius had figured out how to work together, although it had taken a fight to get where they were.

His mind worked very differently from hers. He wasn’t structured or methodical like her. She found his intellect stimulating, she had never seen a wizard work the way he did. Rather than organizing his thoughts he let them flow, he followed his instincts and tried out his ideas as they came. When dealing with magic the results could be disastrous but he was rather clever and most often right.

Juana interrupted Hermione to tell her that dinner was on. Juana and Jorge kept themselves so busy with work that they hadn’t had a lot of

time to visit with their guests. As it happened they both had the afternoon off and had decided to grill outdoors.

Their hosts detected the subtle tension between the two of them. Sirius felt rather badly for the way he had treated Hermione. He wanted to tell her just how special she was in every detail but he wouldn't. His internal battle meant that when he was around her he didn't have a lot to say.

She was incredibly self conscious. The further away she got from her little revelation, the more she doubted it. His current behavior was a big reason why. Over the last week he barely looked in her direction until they went to bed. There under the cover of darkness, where she couldn't see his eyes he pleased her in every way he knew until she was crying out his name, threatening the Silencing Charm.

Juana and Jorge exchanged a look across the table, glancing at the two extremely polite people who had joined them in a meal. Jorge grinned at his wife who inclined her head just slightly.

"So, Mimi, have you been enjoying your stay in my country?" Jorge's voice was low and intentionally seductive, he knew from his own experience that there was nothing quite like jealousy to wake a man up. He had said nothing inappropriate, he wasn't touching her at all but he presented himself like a man infatuated.

Sirius raised his eyes to glare at Jorge who seemed to not even know Sirius was there. He appeared captivated and enraptured with Hermione, who was giggling in a rather girlish fashion. Sirius looked to Juana for support who smiled sweetly and engaged him in polite conversation.

"So, Perro, have you heard anything from home?" He only appeared to be listening as he gave her a grunt as an answer, flicking his eyes up often and listening intently to the conversation between Jorge and Hermione.

"It's so beautiful here, I had a wonderful time in Tapachula. The market square was amazing. I've never seen anything like it." She'd

had so little in the way of conversation lately that she just ate up the attention.

“I would have loved to show the city to you. Pity I had to work.” His voice was rich and hypnotic, he had charm to rival Sirius.

“Well, Sirius showed me around.” Her words were half hearted, there was so much more she wanted to explore but Sirius had been all business. They had taken a turn around the square, stopping only occasionally with very little color commentary.

“Did Perro take you into the Cathedral? It is very old and beautiful.” Hermione’s face fell at his words. Sirius had only mumbled a few words about it and then ushered her along.

Hermione flicked her eyes up at Sirius to see him glowering at his friend. Jorge was wholly unaffected by his friend’s poor mood. Hermione shifted in her seat slightly, putting a little more space between herself and Jorge and engaged Juana in conversation.

“Do you feel like going for a swim later on?” Hermione asked Juana hoping to disengage Jorge.

“Oh, yes! That’s a wonderful idea.” Juana agreed with Hermione enthusiastically.

"Tú no eres el unico que nota lo bella que es. Deberías tener más cuidado, amigo." Jorge told Sirius just how easily he could lose his young wife if he didn’t pull himself together.

"No me dices nada que ya no sepa." Sirius told Jorge he was only too aware of that fact. Sirius was mentally preparing himself for the loss of her even as his jealousy got the best of him.

Hermione had learned a little Spanish but not enough to piece together the conversation between the two men. Nothing Sirius did or said anymore was making sense to her. She got up and helped Juana clear the table. She and Juana cleaned up from dinner and changed into their bikinis. Swimming daily in the warm pacific ocean

ensured that Hermione was no longer shy about her attire. She wore her wrap on her way to the beach but she didn't try to hide the fact that she was going for a swim.

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“Ok, so the idea is to create a golem, give it a message to deliver and then send it.” Hermione spoke with a slightly superior tone, she had this all worked out. He had been reading her notes all week after which they discussed her ideas at length. He used his time playing with the children or catching up with old friends to mentally prepare himself for this side of her.

“Uh, huh.” Sirius looked a little amused, his mouth crooked up one side. Sirius was impressed by her ideas, they were well beyond the NEWT level. Very few witches or wizards even knew what a golem was much less hatched a scheme as involved as hers. He personally only knew of two wizards that had made use of them in recent history. She had reams of notes on how to create a golem and their variety of uses. Golems were more popular in ages past, it wasn't a dark art, just a lost art. The real problem was how to get it from here to Dumbledore

Sirius waved his wand, muttering under his breath. The earth pushed up and began to build on itself, it rose to a pillar that was as tall as Sirius. He continued to mutter spells, the pillar slowly began to take form. Hermione sat on the bench attached to the table they had eaten dinner at, her mouth open and her eyes wide. “You know how to make a golem?”

Sirius waited to answer her question, he continued to form the golem until standing before them was a likeness of his younger self from his Hogwarts days. He observed his golem self quietly, she worried he was overcome with his melancholy once again. He flicked his wand and the golem disintegrated to a pile of dirt on the ground. He flashed her a mischievous grin. “You don't actually think James and I went to detention, do you?”

The Spanish: "¡Buenos días, Pedro!" Good morning, Pedro. "¡Buenos días! Good morning. "Tú no eres el unico que nota lo bella que es. Deberías tener más cuidado, amigo." "You aren't the only one who sees what a beautiful woman she is. You should take more care, my friend" "No me dices nada que ya no sepa." "You aren't telling me anything I don't already know."

Invention

The dementor glided toward the bars of the prison cell, followed by two others. They were excited, this new one was filled with fresh, happy memories.

“Not her,” whimpered the prisoner. It had taken so long to replace the emptiness with something real and good.

All three dementors closed in at once.

“Not her,” he screamed! He didn’t know how he’d gotten thrown back in Azkaban. He couldn’t remember being arrested. He had been so happy, he was on the brink of deciding to take what he wanted. A part of him didn’t believe he was allowed to have something as fine as love. He knew he was being punished for daring to dream.

The prisoner backed up against the cell wall, trying desperately to put space between himself and these gliding horrors. He just wanted to be able to remember what it was like to love her.

“Let me keep her!” Sirius was screaming, he thrashed about in the tiny bed, clammy and sweating.

Hermione woke up with a start. She jumped out of bed and grabbed her wand, ready to do battle if necessary. Sleep quickly fled her brain, there was no one in the room with them. She looked over at the erratic movement from the bed and realized that Sirius was having a nightmare.

“Not Hermione,” he moaned as he thrashed the bed. “Please don’t take Hermione.”

She climbed back into the bed and shook him gently. “Sirius, wake up.”

Sirius continued to batter the bed and mumble incoherently.

She shook him harder and raised her voice. "Sirius! Wake up! It's just a nightmare!"

Sirius opened his eyes slowly and sat up in the bed. "Hermione?"

"Yes, sweetheart. You're alright. It was just a nightmare. You're fine. I'm fine. It's ok." He lay back down, emotionally drained from the nightmare. Hermione pulled him into her arms and stroked his head tenderly. She could hear his heart pounding in his chest.

"Can you go back to sleep?"

Sirius nodded and relaxed completely in her embrace.

Hermione held Sirius in her arms and listened to his breathing regulate as he fell back asleep. He was nestled in her arms almost childlike. He had never had a nightmare with her before. So much wrong had happened to him in his life, she was surprised that he didn't have more of these. Hermione cooed soothingly as she cuddled him close.

She had heard her name, he'd been begging something or someone not to take her away. Was he afraid of losing her? Her hand stroked his hair as she slowly fell back to sleep, dropping to cradle his head once she had drifted off.

Sirius woke up and found himself in her arms. He remembered the night before and felt a surge of shame course through him. No one but Remus had ever been a witness to his nightmares, an event that they never spoke of. He was glad that it wasn't one of his bad ones. It had only taken a few minutes for him to realize that he wasn't in Azkaban. He thought he was finally getting past the nightmares, it had been a few months since he'd had one. He hoped that Hermione would allow him the same sense of privacy that Remus did. He pulled his body out of bed and trudged off to take a shower.

Hermione woke when he pulled himself out of her arms. She waited until he left the room for the shower to slip out of bed and have her

morning cup of coffee and banana. She wasn't sure if she should say anything to him. She decided to let him come to her if he so chose.

When Sirius joined her in the kitchen, she turned to him and kissed him sweetly on the cheek. She smiled for him and then let him be. Sirius felt a wave of gratitude, she let him know she sympathized without saying a word. Sirius reached under the table and squeezed her thigh, it was the only bit of thanks he would be able to give. He never spoke of his dreams, preferring to leave them in the darker corners of his mind.

Her banana and coffee gone, Hermione left the kitchen through the back door.

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Hermione critically observed the ten or so golems she and Sirius had erected. It was complicated magic but once she fully understood the theory putting it into practice was possible. They had given up on using golems to communicate with, it just wasn't practical. There didn't seem to be any good way to get them to their desired target. Sirius demonstrated to her that giving it lifelike qualities was part and parcel to the creation of a golem. He and James routinely used golems to skive off detention while they changed to their Animagus forms to follow more entertaining pursuits. The golem would move, act and even talk like them so long as the interaction wasn't too complex.

Hermione was tempted to tell him just how irresponsible it was to shirk detention. He and James had learned complicated magic to get away with bad behavior. They were as bad as the Weasley twins! She understood with perfect clarity how they got top marks while at the same time put little effort into the act of studying itself. She had to work very hard for her good grades, it seemed Sirius had breezed through his school years. She was both awed and envious.

"If you can charm it to act like you, what else can you charm it to do?" She wanted to play with this magic a little more. Maybe they could do something useful for the Order.

“Like what?”

“Oh, I don’t know. Could be useful to have a double of yourself on the battlefield. Give the impression you were two places at once.” Sirius noticed that Hermione was wearing that little frown, the one she always wore when working something out.

“I guess, but what would it do?”

“What if you could arm it with a spell. Fred and George charmed hats to carry a Shield Charm, why not a golem with a Disarming Charm or even an offensive spell?”

Hermione and Sirius worked together to try and improve on the golems. The golems could also be charmed to tackle or strike an opponent but would probably be more effective acting as a shield from unfriendly fire. The golem could take the brunt of a spell but only one. It didn’t matter what the spell was, it could be anything from a Tickling Charm to an Unforgivable. Once the spell made contact the golem would crumble into dust.

Arming the golem had taken her most of the week, it couldn’t be added once the golem was created. That was how they discovered that a single spell would destroy a golem. Sirius watched her try repeatedly, it didn’t matter what sort of spell she tried to give it. The strength or type of spell had exactly the same effect.

Her efforts gave him a thought, he called one of the golems aside, raised his wand and said “Crucio!” Hermione wheeled around in time to see the golem absorb the spell and explode, shock was evident on her face.

“What was that for?”

“I’m just curious to see what they can handle.” He observed his handiwork thoughtfully and then called over another golem. He raised his wand, careful to note that Hermione was safely behind him. “Avada Kedavra!” The jet of green light was fully absorbed by the golem, it shattered to the ground as a mound of earth.

“Didn’t like that one?”

Sirius shifted his gaze in her direction. “Smart ass.”

“Sirius what are you doing?”

Instead of answering her he called over another golem. He raised his wand, “Divesto!” A fresh pile of earth lay on the ground.

“What! Why did that one explode?” Hermione began to sense a method to his apparent madness.

Sirius called over another golem, “Expelliarmus!” Hermione watched the last of their golems collapse back to dirt and understood the problem.

Hermione raised her wand, muttering as earth began to take on a vaguely human shape. Before she had finished her creation it exploded. She let out a long sigh. “Well that didn’t work.”

“Try adding it right after the dirt first starts to rise.” Sirius went to work at the same attempt. Over and over his forming clods exploded.

Sirius kept trying in vain, in the middle of another attempt something surprised him. Sirius heard the deep, unaltered voice of a golem speak the word, “Expelliarmus!” The jet of light flew out across the backyard in the direction of the ocean.

“You did it!” Sirius was ecstatic, he loved this idea of hers.

“Its less to do with the words and more to do with the intent behind the spell.” Hermione raised her wand, another clod of earth began to form. Once finished she ordered it to cast the spell she gave it, another jet of light flew out towards the ocean.

Several more attempts and she was satisfied they had the spell figured out. Now that she had the charm that armed the golem she turned her attention to the form she gave it. She made another one,

only this time she focused only on eyes to see with, ears to hear with and a mouth to utter the spells incantation. She reasoned that it didn't need features to be useful in battle. She gave her creation crude hands and arms, paying slightly more attention to feet and legs. She left off clothes and skin as those were unnecessary to the task she would give it. The creation that stood before her was an odd looking entity. It looked like a large, vaguely human clod of animated earth. Sirius found the face rather unnerving, it lacked the definition that a skull provided. It was simply a round shape out of which sprung ears, eyes and a mouth.

The benefit of such simplicity was that it was easier to make than the well defined copy of herself. Not only was it easier it took less time to make, all valuable points in the setting of war. There was still value in the perfect carbon copy, they would make fabulous decoys.

She and Sirius planned battle strategies based around the use of golems. They could be charmed to act as shields for the Order as well as decoys. He thought that fifty or so golems armed to Stun or Disarm would be effective. They would be charmed to act as a shield after their spell was released. Hermione thought each Order member could benefit from having a golem double. They would need to show the other members how it was accomplished but for Sirius this was a weakness. He was rather extraordinarily gifted but he wasn't good at explaining the method. Hermione on the other hand excelled at explaining the inner workings of magical ability.

"You know what this means, though, don't you?" Her tone carried a hint of humor.

"No, what?"

"You're going to have to make up a lot of detentions ."

Sirius let out a bark of laughter. "We we're in trouble with McGonagall more than any other professor. I can just imagine the look on her face. Students using her subject against her." He flashed her a mischievous smile.

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While things were going well with the golems they were no closer to communicating with the Order. Hermione had read about something called a Sending but other than that she knew nothing. She mentioned it to him earlier in the week. Sirius was familiar with the term but had never tried it. Over the last week he had been working on it during his walk. The results were mixed and on one occasion potentially harmful.

Hermione sat at the kitchen table, quill in hand, ink and parchment resting on the table. She was outlining the theory behind arming the golems in great detail so that it could be taught to the rest of the Order. She felt a sense of urgency, they had been in Mexico for a few weeks and felt the time to leave was looming. Every morning over coffee she half expected to see Hedwig flutter in with a note from Harry.

They would either be called home to fight in the final battle or after the war was finished. She didn't really believe that Dumbledore would let a pair of able bodied fighters sit it out on the sidelines, that's why perfecting their contributions was so important. They both wanted something to show for their time away. What if she was wrong though? What if Dumbledore didn't have time to send for them or what if they got back just as the battle was won?

The unanswered question between Hermione and Sirius would take center stage.

Hermione had been giving his question a lot of thought. What did she want? She kept coming back to that question. It wasn't until she considered what it would be like not having him in her life that the answer became clear to her. She didn't want to lose him. She still wasn't thrilled that she had been forced into this, forced to lose her virginity but now that she was in it she knew there was no place she would rather be. It felt like a tiny bit of victory to her, this law which was meant to hurt her had in actuality given her something wonderful. It had given her Sirius.

She thought about this intelligent, loving, daring, courageous man. No one had stimulated her intellect the way he did. He didn't reason things out in the same way which was part of how he kindled the fire in her own mind. He held his own in any conversation with her, taking her ideas into places she might not have gone.

He was her dark knight, growling and bristling like his Animagus form in his defense of her. He had no qualms about speaking his mind and acting on his intuition. His confrontations with Draco had led to their current predicament but he gave her the means to fight back, to not simply take what was being handed to her. He didn't assume he could do it all for her or keep her in the dark as things were developing. He helped her to participate in shaping her own fate where others often wanted to treat her as a helpless girl. He saw her as the adult she was.

Then there was the sex. Dear god, she didn't want to live without the sex. Before Sirius she had no idea she could feel so good. He made her feel like the most desirable woman on the planet and the only one he wanted to touch. He had a filthy mouth, saying things out loud she had never even thought and the truth was, she loved it. He was passionate and knew exactly what her body was capable of and how to get her there. She let out a little sigh of contentment.

Hermione realized that she was in love with Sirius. She didn't know when it had happened, it felt like it was a gradual event. It didn't really matter when, what mattered now was how to tell Sirius. Was she right about him? Did he return her feelings? Hope fluttered in her stomach along with a tiny seed of doubt. If he loved her then why had he been so distant last week?

This week he had been completely different, they had been working together every day on the golems and of course their morning practice sessions. He was back to his friendly, flirtatious self. Once they were past theory and into doing the magic he was every bit the hard worker she was. What was more, he didn't get frustrated the way she did. He seemed to expect failures, he simply used them as a reference point for the next go. She learned a lot about experimentation watching him work. His example led to her discovery. He was a good match for her. Suddenly her eyes flew open, she had

her answer. Hermione raised her head in time to see something odd in the far corner of the room.

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Sirius' feet led him down the familiar path to his friend Estaban's home. Estaban lived a couple of miles outside the village on a few acres. Like Sirius himself, Estaban was a wizard and the only one Sirius knew to reside in the area. Sirius wanted to introduce Hermione to his friend but he had yet to find him. Estaban lived as many country wizards did in this part of Mexico, helping out the poor among his countrymen. His vocation meant he was on the go a lot.

While on his walk Sirius thought more about communicating with home. They had no idea how to accomplish a Sending, it was all experimentation met with failure. Undaunted Sirius continued to try whatever idea popped into his head. The first time he tried it out what he ended up doing was Apparating to Hermione's precise location, nearly on top of her. Once he picked her up off the beach she sat him down and debriefed him of the experience. She wasn't sure if he was on the right track or not, after all the result had been a bit off.

The really curious thing to her was that he brought himself to her. He hadn't known she had taken a walk down the beach. When he'd left to find Estaban she was still in the kitchen. She wondered if he hadn't made an improvement on Apparition.

Each day Sirius tried something new, there were always results although most were rather unexpected and occasionally dangerous. Sirius didn't mind taking the risk even though he'd had a few close calls over the last week. Once he even splinched a bald patch on his head. Hermione had quickly remedied the situation, sending his hair back to its rightful location. She was a little shaken by the incident but Sirius just laughed it off.

As his feet found their own way down the unpaved road he thought over their week. They had been working on the Sending, in fact they had been working all week and rather hard at that. They had their practice sessions and planning sessions and now they had their experimental magic sessions. He marveled at how well they worked

together although he said nothing out loud. They accomplished more by working as a team, he found he had a new appreciation for her.

With everything they were trying to accomplish Sirius' mind was taken completely off feeling sorry for himself. He'd shed his overcast sky for something a bit more sunny, he hadn't changed his mind about anything but he didn't have time to dwell on it. He was back to his flirting and his teasing of her.

He wondered how it was that he knew where she was without knowing where she was. He began focusing his mind less on getting to her and more on just seeing her, seeing where she was. Every time he Apparated to her location he had a glimpse of her first so he focused on getting to the glimpse rather than on reaching her.

He paused in midstride, seeing her quite clearly in his mind. She was sitting at the Arroyo's kitchen table, making notes and occasionally sucking on the end of her quill. He smiled at the little stain she would get on her lips after studying too hard or too long. It wasn't a day dream of her, the clarity was that of sight not of imagination. She looked up and smiled at him. Wait, no that wasn't possible, he was on the other side of the village on his way to see a friend, she was still at the Arroyo's. Hermione stood up and walked over to him, there was a look of wonder on her face.

"You did it Sirius, you really did it." Her voice sounded like it was coming through a long tunnel.

He just stared at her for a minute in disbelief. "Hermione?"

She nodded her head vigorously.

"We did it?" He asked incredulously. Hermione nodded her head again, a huge smile on her face. In his shock and amazement he lost the vision of her. He turned on his path and ran back to the house.

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Hermione watched as the semblance of Sirius began to materialize before her eyes. She could tell it wasn't him, generally speaking Sirius wasn't see through. It wasn't a ghost either, she could clearly see his tanned skin, blue jeans and dark green shirt. Hermione got up from her seat and walked over to the vision of Sirius.

"You did it Sirius, you really did it." She was stunned and a little aroused. This man could do anything he wanted to.

"Hermione?" His voice sounded far away, it was just an echo of his own deep baritone.

She nodded her head vigorously.

"We did it?" He sounded amazed, he had tried so many things this week and none of them had worked out very well.

Suddenly the vision was gone, Sirius had lost his concentration.

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Hermione was pacing out in back of the Arroyo's home, she was chewing on her lower lip. They would be communicating with home which meant that they might be going home soon. She had to act and act soon but how? What was wrong with him last week? If he was in love with her then what was that nonsense he uttered last week. No meant to be, that's what he said. They were not meant to be.

Would he give her up for something as flimsy as that? Why? None of it made any sense to her and it made her feel insecure and unsure about stating her feelings. She had to make him see that fate didn't order their lives, the choices they made did. What did he think she would do? Go back to school, back to her life as if though nothing had happened. Whether or not they fell in love something had happened and it meant they would never be the same again. She couldn't imagine what was going through his brain. There was no going back, how could there be? That much was obvious.

Then there were the words he'd mumbled last night in his sleep. Was he afraid of losing her? If so why didn't he say something? None of this added up.

This man hadn't caught a break in almost twenty years. Why couldn't he just accept that something good had happened to him?

She decided then and there to make sure that he did.

[illegible]

A/N: Thank you for the reviews!

Well, Mexico took a little longer than I expected so we are now looking at just over 20 chapters, maybe 21?

Updates might be a little slow, my muse is going strong its just for the next 8 weeks I'll be up to my eyeballs in something.

Return

NC17

After making contact with the Order they waited in Mexico just long enough to thank Juana and Jorge for their hospitality and to say goodbye. They Apparated back to England, making several stops along the way. They returned to number twelve, Grimmauld Place under the cover of darkness with a guard they picked up in Germany.

Hermione tingled with excitement, she was being allowed to attend her first ever Order meeting. She, Harry and Ron had wanted to participate more in the activities that shaped their lives. At long last she was getting to do just that. Sirius had made the case to Dumbledore that with all she had been through she had earned the right. She sat at the dining room table and looked over the notes she would be handing out to the Order.

Dumbledore was well pleased with the way they used their time away. Remus and Molly had raised an eyebrow at the pair who were tanned and looked well rested. It was a stark contrast to the way the rest of the Order looked. Their friends were tired and harried, the only time any of them got any rest was when they retreated to number twelve. Sirius was more than ready to take up his place in the fight, he was fresh and ready to do battle. Dumbledore had sent him out on a mission to create golems with the help of Remus and Minerva McGonagall. Hermione stayed behind to prepare notes for tonight's meeting.

Hermione heard a sound at the door, she turned around and smiled as she saw Molly Weasley walk through. Hermione was grateful for the company, she had been by herself for half the day and hadn't seen Sirius since earlier in the week. Seeing Molly alive and well if a little worn and thin was a very good thing. Hermione launched herself at the older woman, she held onto her, so glad to see her well. Molly helped Hermione to calm down, reassuring her she had not been hurt the day she and Sirius had gone on the run.

"How are you doing dear?" Molly sat the girl down and patted her on the hand.

“Good, worried. You know?” Satisfied that she had her notes in perfect order she tapped them and they began to make copies of themselves. “Can I help?”

Molly gratefully accepted Hermione’s help and together the two women set to work on enough food to feed a small army. As they worked Molly filled Hermione in on who she had seen that day, who was injured and who was dead. So far no one Hermione knew had lost their lives. The deaths were all confined to newer members, those who hadn’t fought in the first war or who weren’t personally trained by Harry.

Hermione asked after Harry and Ron who were still at Hogwarts. She had seen them briefly after her return but they had to go back school. Hogwarts was still a stronghold for the Order and Albus Dumbledore was still in control of his school.

“I saw Sirius as well, earlier. He’s at Hogwarts making those moving statues of yours.” Molly smiled when she saw Hermione visibly relax. She was hoping to get some information from Hermione on how the pair was doing.

“Oh, thank you! I’ve been so worried. He left so soon after we arrived and he’s only been back once.” The tension Molly had noticed across Hermione’s brow seemed to melt away.

“The two of you look rather well. I still haven’t heard where you were hiding yourselves.” Molly didn’t really care where they’d been. She wanted to hear how the marriage was progressing.

“Sirius said not to tell, in case we ever had to return.” Hermione looked a little guilty. She said it as nicely as she could, she didn’t want to offend.

“Well, then at least tell me about your time away with him. Must have been a bit romantic.” Molly decided to dive into the heart of the matter. She had a feeling Hermione needed to talk nearly as much as she herself wanted to hear the details.

Hermione stopped for a moment and just looked at Molly. She would really like to talk to Ginny but maybe Mrs. Weasley could help her understand Sirius.

“He’s a bit of puzzle, actually.” Hermione said the words slowly as she collected her thoughts.

“Oh? How so?” Molly wanted to draw her out to get every detail. It was for the girl’s own good she told herself.

“I think he’s fallen in love with me, but then he acts so strange. I get this push pull feeling from him. Like one moment he’s drawing me in and the next pushing me away.” Hermione shook her head slightly in puzzlement, she was chewing her bottom lip.

“How do you feel, dear?” So, she thought to herself, Sirius has fallen in love and is fighting it. Well, that just figures. Molly made a mental note to speak with Sirius alone.

“I’m in love with him.” Hermione’s tone was soft, she smiled shyly at Molly before turning away. When she spoke again there was a waver in her voice. “You know he told me we were n-not meant to be.”

“He said what?” Molly’s voice rose a little more quickly than she had intended.

Hermione nodded her head. “Utter rubbish,” she muttered darkly.

“Have you told him how you felt?” If he knew Hermione was in love with him and still pushed her away...Well, Molly was resolved to remove a few important appendages.

“I just figured it out myself. I knew he was in love with me before I knew I was in love with him.” Hermione laughed lightly at herself, it was so obvious and yet it had taken her so long to figure it out.

Molly smiled, “You know its usually the other way around.”

“It seems I’m a bit daft when it comes to matters of the heart.” Hermione heaved a sigh and shook her head at herself. “I almost think he doesn’t want to let himself have this, have love in his life.”

“Well, you’ll just have to convince him otherwise.” Molly lay a comforting hand over the younger woman’s and gave it a squeeze.

“Yes, but how?” Hermione was in new territory, it seemed everything to do with Sirius made her stretch as a person.

“I would think telling him would do the trick, don’t you?” Molly put all of the vegetables and meat into a large cauldron and lit the fire underneath it. “He’ll be back this evening for the Order meeting and I believe that he’ll be home for at least one night.”

“Just tell him?” Hermione sounded unsure.

“Sometimes we just have to lay our heart on the line for the one’s we love.”

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Remus, Sirius and Minerva McGonagall were hard at work on creating the armed golems. Minerva was still letting Sirius know what she thought about his evade from detention. It had embarrassed her that she couldn’t tell a transfigured Sirius and James from the real thing. If Sirius had mentioned it to her in private she could let it go with a chuckle but he had let it slip while in front of Albus Dumbledore.

“I should require you to make up those detentions!”

“So, twelve years in Azkaban wasn’t quite enough, do you think?” Her anger had been amusing at first but she wouldn’t let it go. He was nearing his fill of her.

His words had the desired affect, he could still hear her fuming and muttering but she mostly kept her thoughts to herself.

Remus was mildly amused by his friend, he suspected that Sirius and James hadn't served all of their many detentions. He and James always had a few secrets between them, Hermione had uncovered a big one.

"You know I'm surprised you haven't been back to Grimmauld to visit with Hermione. Why are you staying at the castle?" Remus was genuinely surprised by his friend's behavior.

"Just trying to make it easier for her." Sirius put the finishing touches on his current creation.

"Make what easier on her?" Remus looked over at Sirius suspiciously, completely unable to fathom his friend.

The three of them were just finishing up the last of their creations when Albus Dumbledore walked out onto the grounds to see them. Dumbledore's face was ashen, he looked older than he had in years. The weight of his many years seemed to be pressing in on him.

"Sirius there is an old friend of yours in my office. Would you mind terribly escorting her to headquarters?"

"Absolutely, password is the same?"

"Yes. Thank you, Sirius."

Sirius bade his friend and former professors goodbye and left immediately for Professor Dumbledore's office.

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Hermione looked closely at the woman walking in with Sirius, she was leaning heavily on him for support. She was rather disheveled looking but there was something familiar about her. It wasn't until the woman looked up and recognized her that she made the connection.

"Well, if it isn't Little Miss Perfect. What are you doing here?" Rita Skeeter's voice had lost its usual snap, she sounded tired and looked

just horrible. There were rhinestones missing from her glasses, she had no make up on and her dress was torn.

Sirius stepped away from Rita like he had been burned, the look his wife was giving Rita could have held a Killing Curse. Rita looked at Sirius questioningly, she looked back at Hermione and the truth of the situation hit her.

“Oh, you’ve got to be kidding me. Not her Sirius!” She didn’t expect Sirius to go for the bookish type. His usual girl was leggy and blond without much upstairs.

Sirius grinned sheepishly at Rita as he walked over to Hermione, he lay a chaste kiss on her cheek and sat down beside her. “Rita, what have you got against my wife?” He said sternly for Hermione’s benefit.

Rita saw through the ruse and rolled her eyes at Sirius. “Your wife tried to ruin my career!”

“Your career tried to ruin my personal life!” Hermione shot her retort with a bite. “You lied about me! I got hate mail for weeks!”

“The truth is subjective, it certainly looked like you were playing two wizards at once.”

Sirius wanted to interject that that was the most ridiculous thing he had ever heard but decided he really didn’t want to get into the fray. He only knew a little of the disagreement between Hermione and Rita.

“What happened to you anyway? You look dreadful!” Hermione said the last bit with obvious pleasure.

“Ever the concerned and caring witch, I see,” taunted Rita.

“I just want to know who to send the thank you card to.” Sirius’ eyebrows went up in surprise, he’d only heard a little of the fight between these two women. The venom in Hermione’s tone surprised him.

“Well, you can thank You-Know-Who for this!” Rita gestured to herself.

“Oh.” Rita’s words took the wind out of Hermione’s sails. It wasn’t until she saw the smug grin on Rita’s face that she regained her composure.

Hermione stood up and gave Rita a once over. “Well, I better go send off that owl.” Hermione left the room with a disdainful look on her face.

Rita knew Hermione was bluffing but the girl’s behavior was still shocking.

Sirius looked just as dumbstruck as Rita. “Well, you certainly have an interesting effect on my wife. What exactly was that all about?”

Rita waved her hand impatiently. “Nothing important. The girl is just over reacting.”

“Ruined her personal life?” Sirius raised an eyebrow, he knew Rita could have a wicked quill. He loved his celebrity which is why Rita loved him. Her stories about him all had an affectionate ‘boys will be boys’ overtone. He was a rare exception, though and he knew it.

“So,” said Rita lazily. “There are girls that you marry and girls that you don’t, I see.”

Sirius refused to embarrass Hermione with an explanation to Rita of how they came to be married. He was happy with the outcome and didn’t want to be pitied. “Looks that way, doesn’t it? She really is a good girl, you two just got off on the wrong foot with each other.”

“I thought you made a nice pairing with Lyra Edgecombe. Nice family, beautiful, cultured...” Rita baited to see his reaction. He had dated her longer than many of the others. It was rumored something more lasting was starting between them.

“Lyra was...enthusiastic but I didn’t have any long term plans for her.” Sirius knew Rita was fishing and that she would use what he

gave her to hurt Hermione. "Well, I guess we won't be giving you that interview." Sirius had a sly smile on his face. He was just dying to see Rita's reaction.

"What! Why? I'm a professional, she'll just have to get over it!"

"Hmmm...do you remember what you promised me?"

"No...what?"

"That it would be your most flattering interview ever." Rita mouthed wordlessly, she was turning green and looked as if she would be sick. Sirius chuckled softly, he patted Rita on the back and went in search of his wife.

Sirius realized his mistake as he walked into the library. There was little need to behave as a married couple any longer. The final battle loomed, if they lost Hermione would need to leave the country, if they won the marriage law would be repealed. He was trying to make the transition easier on her but instead had acted on instinct, as usual. Sirius found Hermione in the library still fuming over her confrontation with Rita. She turned sharply when she heard the door to the library open.

Sirius kept to the shadows near the door thinking the less she saw of him the better. "I had no idea you had a best friend outside of Harry and Ron." Sirius grinned, he knew she would be a little embarrassed over her display. He waited for her to say something but apparently she wasn't going to explain or justify her behavior, which was fine with him. He really only wanted her to listen, to hear him out.

"You know, Rita helped us get married." He paused for a reaction, she looked surprised but said nothing. Hermione was puzzled by his mysterious behavior, he was concealed in the shadows and wasn't moving into the room.

"Remember when I told you that the ministry gave me some trouble about getting our marriage license?" She nodded, still listening but

not saying anything. Hermione began to move toward him, closing the distance between them.

“Well, she went to the ministry with me that day. She helped convince them to see things my way.” Sirius moved along the edge of the room, away from Hermione. He let his hair fall into his face to hide his features. She looked so good to him, he wanted to reach out and grab, take her bent over a chair, on a couch or up against the wall. He knew if she saw his face she would see the raw emotion and sexual hunger displayed across his face.

“She did?” Hermione was surprised Rita did anything out of the goodness of her heart. “Why?” Hermione wondered at the slow chase through the library, if she didn’t know better he was hiding from her.

“Well, I’ve done a number of interviews for her, developed a bit of a working relationship with her.” Sirius moved toward the center of the room which was a mistake. He was nearly hemmed in by couches, tables and chairs. He saw it as the quickest route to the door but realized that as close as she was he was nearly trapped.

“You like her?” Hermione looked shocked. “She accused me of playing both Harry and Viktor. I was only fourteen at the time!” Sirius was now backing away from her. It all clicked in her brain, he was pushing her away again. Its why he hadn’t been to see her all week.

“Well, I admit that’s below the belt. But look at it like this, she’s really been through something.” The back of Sirius’ legs bumped up against a couch and he fell into it with a soft thud.

“What happened to her?” Hermione considered her options as she strode slowly forward.

“Cruciatu curse, mostly. She was beat up a bit as well.” Sirius looked about surreptitiously, if he stood up he would walk strait into Hermione.

“Just because she helped you that day?” Hermione stood in front of him, she hadn’t seen him in days. His jeans were on tight, his shirt was open and she was horny as hell. She had made up her mind.

“Well, that and the article she ran about our experience that day.” Sirius had a few curious side affects associated with his Animagus form. One of them was a keen sense of smell. He was always able to tell when she was aroused by the change in her body chemistry, it was a pungent, pleasing odor. He was never so affected by it as he was at this moment, at this moment it was making his mouth water.

“She’s always doing articles on you, what you’re up to, who you’re dating. I’m surprised she hasn’t done one on us. I can just imagine what that headline would like. ‘Hogwarts Heartbreaker Bags Sirius Black’” Hermione snorted in derision.

“We won’t be giving her an interview. I’ve already spoken to her.” Said Sirius, wondering what she was going to do. Hermione lifted her top over her head and let it drop to the ground. Sirius was rendered speechless.

“I don’t want to talk about Rita anymore. I’ve missed you. I miss having you all to myself.” She unsnapped her bra and let it fall to the floor as well.

Sirius found his voice. “You do? I thought you would like a break.” Hermione crawled into his lap and began to unbutton his shirt.

“No, I never wanted a break from you.” Sirius was startled by the look in her soft, brown eyes. Her eyes were filled with love and desire. Hermione shifted herself to straddled Sirius. She lowered her lips to his, her kiss began soft but quickly turned heated. She had one hand fisted in his soft black hair, the other rested on his chest.

Hermione had so much to say to him but at the moment she only wanted to express herself physically. She kissed away from his mouth, down across his jaw. The rough stubble of a days worth of growth rubbed against the soft skin on her lips. He was just so male and right now all hers.

Sirius ran his hands up her back, pulling her body closer. He had never seen this side of her, it was a huge turn on for him, he was curious to see what she would do. A moan that sounded more like a growl left his lips as she ground herself into his crotch.

Hermione let her lips explore the skin on his neck, he hadn't tried to take over, letting her do as she pleased. She licked, nipped and sucked while listening carefully to see what he liked. She moved her hands to open his shirt, she stared at the tattoos she had seen so many times before. She had always wondered what they meant but had never asked.

"Why have I never asked you about these?" She traced the large design with her finger.

"Probably because I usually don't like to talk about Azkaban." For some reason he didn't think he would mind sharing with her.

She placed tiny, fluttery kisses along his chest, tracing the tattoo with her tongue. Sirius let out a moan of pleasure, he felt like he could tell her anything. Whatever she wanted to know about him, he would tell her, if she asked he would pour out his heart to her.

"Do they mean anything?" She trailed lower along his chest.

"Not really. Its just what you did in there."

"The secrets to Sirius Black aren't written across your chest?" Her fingers found his belt, she loosened and moved to the button on his pants.

"I don't want to have any secrets from you," he whispered. He couldn't help himself, he leaned forward and palmed a breast in each hand.

"No secrets?" She paused to look at him, searching his face for the truth. He pulled her close, her chest pressed against his. His lips claimed hers in a hard searing kiss.

“I’ll tell you anything you want to know.” The look in his eyes laid bare the raw emotion he felt for her.

Hermione reached between his legs and grabbed a hold of his cock, he pressed it into her hand. She unzipped his pants and reached into his boxers to find his hardened length. She rubbed gently up and down his length, listening to him moan, pleased that she could get such a nice reaction.

Hermione put her feet on the floor, she unbuttoned and unzipped her jeans, wriggling out of them, never breaking eye contact with Sirius. She slipped out of her panties and crawled back into his lap. She lifted her bottom and impaled herself on his long, hard member. Sirius let out a low, guttural moan.

Hermione hadn’t done this very often, she started off achingly slow. Once she had corrected her balance she began to ride him faster and faster. She kissed his mouth, his jaw, his neck. She possessed him the way he usually claimed her. He had hoped to avoid this but found himself helpless to stop her.

He knew that this was going to make things harder and for that he was a little angry with her. He took it out on her by grabbing her by the hips and ass and pounding into her without mercy. He had never taken her this hard or this rough. A fleeting thought in the back of his mind said that this was wrong but instead of crying out in shock or pain she moaned his name in ecstasy.

Hermione began the sweet climb to her explosion. He had never made her feel this good, possessed her so completely as he was right now. The ball of tension released, wave after wave of pleasure coursed through her body. She collapsed boneless across his chest. As she listened to his heart and breathing regulate she whispered in his ear.

“Just let me love you, Sirius. Please...please let me love you.”

The anger he felt toward her drained off of him, he wrapped his arms around him and held her tightly to his body.

[illegible]

A/N: Thank you for the reviews!

Boy am I glad we are out of Mexico! I was having trouble getting them home!

Please review!

Apocalypse

A tall blond man appeared out of thin air, a second later a woman appeared beside him. Together they followed a well manicured garden path up toward a large manor house.

“The Dark Lord himself honors your house with his presence?” The woman was unable to keep the envy out of her voice.

“Silence, Bella! Wait until we’re indoors!” The blond looked around, just because he didn’t see the enemy didn’t mean they weren’t out there.

Lucius Malfoy was absolutely right, he didn’t see them and they were out there. What’s more, they now knew the exact location of Voldemort.

Two wizards peered out from the ornate gardens at Malfoy Manor, they would have been too far away to catch the interchange between Lucius Malfoy and Bellatrix Lestrange had it not been for a pair of Extendable Ears that Molly Weasley had confiscated from her twin sons.

Sirius, who was tailing Bellatrix Lestrange, smiled grimly at Remus, who was tailing Lucius Malfoy. The ticking of the doomsday clock was nearly deafening, the world they knew was hours away from all out warfare.

“You go,” whispered Sirius. “I’ll keep watch, I’ll send a patronus if anything changes.”

Remus eyed his childhood friend critically, sizing him up. “Sirius, please promise me you’ll wait for backup before doing anything.”

“Yes, yes. I’ll wait, I may be rash but I’m not stupid. I’ll get my chance to repay Bella, all in good time.” He gestured emphatically that Remus should leave.

“Promise me, Sirius. Swear on our friendship, as a Marauder.” Remus felt uneasy about leaving Sirius to his own devices. The last time he saw his friend he was behaving oddly, there had been something fatalistic about Sirius’ demeanor. Wait, no...that wasn’t exactly right. That was the last time he had spoken to Sirius. The last time he saw Sirius was in the library of number twelve, Grimmauld Place. He had seen quite a lot of Sirius and Hermione, too. The two encounters with Sirius, on the same day no less, were rather incongruous. He had been meaning to ask Sirius about that day.

Molly Weasley had asked Remus to call Hermione and Sirius to the Order meeting. They learned from Rita that the pair was somewhere in the house together and that Hermione was in ‘a snit’ over something. Remus expected to walk in on a fight, he was prepared for that. What he was not prepared for was to find Hermione riding Sirius like he was a racehorse. He had walked in at the moment of their completion, much to his embarrassment.

The couple hadn’t heard Remus, who had exited like he was being chased by dementors. Try as he might he couldn’t chase the scene out of his head. If Sirius was avoiding her by staying at the castle then what was the interchange in the library about? Was there love between these two and was Sirius fighting it?

“Did you hear me, Remus? I said I promise I won’t do anything without back up.” Sirius seemed a little annoyed that his solemn oath was all but ignored by his friend.

“I’m sorry, Padfoot. For some reason I was reminded of my last trip to the Black family library.” Sirius found he was rather annoyed by Remus’ tone and the odd smile playing across his features.

“Oh, find something interesting to read?” Sirius’ tone dripped with sarcasm, he sensed that Remus had something to say.

“Not to read, no.” Remus wore a cocky grin worthy of Sirius himself.

“Is there a point? Would you mind terribly making it so you can go tell the Order that Voldemort is here?” Sirius knew Remus was toying with him but the subject matter itself was proving elusive.

Remus flicked his wand and sent off a patronus. “There is no need for me to go in person. My point, dear Padfoot, is that I saw something in the library that I would rather not have.”

“Oh,” said Sirius, comprehension dawning. “Sorry about that. So, was that it? I mean, that’s not the first time you’ve caught me shagging.” Sirius wasn’t feeling as nonchalant as he was trying to portray. Hermione wasn’t sport, the intimacy was real and was something Sirius would have preferred to keep private.

“I just think its interesting that earlier that same day you were avoiding her and then that night shagging her in the library.”

“That was private...” Began Sirius but Remus cut him off.

“Yes, it certainly was. If you conducted your ‘private’ in private instead of a common area then we wouldn’t be having this conversation.” Remus was pretty sure he knew what was going on. He knew what Sirius thought of himself. The outward image of self-confident arrogance was habit, at one time it had been real. Azkaban had taken a lot out of Sirius and left him convinced of his worthlessness. He knew Sirius would have trouble believing he deserved Hermione or anyone to love for that matter.

“We aren’t having this conversation, Moony.” Sirius knew Remus could see his vulnerability and Sirius was at his limit of feeling vulnerable. Not that he would define it in such simple terms. Sirius preferred his melodrama, where he was noble and self sacrificing. He was loath to admit to feeling undeserving or unworthy.

“Oh, yes we certainly are, Padfoot. So, tell me...why you were hiding from her?”

Sirius sighed heavily, “I’ve not been completely upfront with her.”

“Are you in love with her?” Remus took Sirius’ silence as a yes. “Have you told her?” More silence. “So the question becomes why haven’t you told her?”

“Why?” Asked Sirius, incredulity evident in his tone. “Is that really a question? She didn’t ask to be chained to a wizard twice her age, she has her whole life ahead of her. She should be with someone her own age to explore it with, not an old wizard who is damaged goods.”

“You’re not damaged...” Remus tried to defend Sirius against himself but was cut off.

“Azkaban took everything I had to give.” Sirius really didn’t want to explain himself. Remus knew all this.

“Does she love you?” Remus already knew the answer to this question. When Sirius and Hermione returned it was more than obvious how she felt about him.

“When are you going to tell her, Sirius?” Remus nudged his friend a little.

“I’m a selfish man, Moony. I was about to tell her I loved her but Molly came barging in. I guess that was your doing?”

“There was no way I was going to interrupt you two.”

“Coward!” Sirius laughed lightly at his friend. “Well, she did. Ever since I’ve been second guessing myself.”

“It’s ok to let yourself have this, Sirius.” Remus pushed at the branches of the bush they were hiding in.

“I’m thirty nine,” blurted Sirius.

“That is a technicality,” replied Remus, an eyebrow cocked in challenge.

“What?” Said Sirius, a bit stupidly.

“Oh, please. What thirty nine year old do you act like? I’ll tell you. None.” Remus bit his words with mock impatience.

“What’s your point?” It irritated Sirius that Remus was using a Molly Weasley type of argument.

“My point? My real point is that you spent twelve years living among dementors. I know what you think of yourself and why wouldn’t you? Your self perception is distorted. You are a good man, Sirius.” Remus forced Sirius to look him in the eye.

“You’ve little to worry about, Remus. I’m not letting her go. I can’t bring myself to do it, believe me I’ve tried.” Sirius shifted uncomfortably on the ground, branches from the bush they were hiding in were poking at him.

“Does she make you happy?” Remus already knew the answer.

“I’ve only had one nightmare in the last two months. Just one nightmare since she came and stayed with me.” Remus stared at him in shock, he had wondered how Hermione would deal with the nightmares. Apparently she made them go away.

“Are you sure that it’s her? Maybe you were finally getting over them.”

“Positive. That’s when I knew I couldn’t ever let her go. When I heard her sweet voice I instantly knew I wasn’t in Azkaban.” Sirius’ voice was soft and quiet. He was a little embarrassed opening himself up this way. Hermione had wrought an incredible change in the once jaded man.

Remus was quiet for a moment before he spoke. “Why don’t you go back to headquarters, let them know where I am and speak with that girl of yours.”

Sirius' face broke out in an incredible smile. "You know, I think I will do just that."

Remus chuckled as his friend left with a soft pop.

0000000000000000

Hermione paced nervously back and forth in front of the fireplace in the drawing room of number twelve, Grimmauld Place. She was nervous because she knew that when Sirius found out what she was about to do, he would be absolutely furious. She read over the note she was leaving one more time and then sat pensively in the chair, waiting.

Harry and Ron wouldn't contact her for at least another hour, the boys had to dodge prying eyes of their own. She fervently hoped Sirius didn't return before she had a chance to get away, he would stop all three of them if he could. He treated all of them as adults but she was fairly certain his patience wouldn't extend to what they were about to embark on.

The current situation wasn't helping the tension she felt where he was concerned. A week ago in this house, upstairs in the Black family library she was certain he was seconds away from declaring his love for her. The moment was ruined when Molly Weasley came crashing in.

Hermione was mortified to be caught naked on top of Sirius, only minutes after climaxing. She hopped off him and jumped into her clothes as quickly as possible. Sirius was more relaxed about being caught, he seemed to be humoring Molly who was ranting about proper behavior.

Molly finished her rant by telling them the Order was ready and waiting for Hermione's presentation. Hermione colored when she thought about the fact that she was late to her first Order meeting. She was certain everyone knew what she'd been up to. She pulled herself together and gave a professional lecture on making a personal golem.

The second half of the meeting involved Dumbledore passing out missions. Sirius would be tailing Bellatrix Lestrange starting directly after the meeting. There would be no time to talk, no time for him to respond to what she had said.

He took a minute to kiss her hard on the lips. He promised her he would be safe, he promised they would talk as soon as he got back. She had been unable to sleep that night, her stomach was in knots for days afterward.

Bellatrix had already killed Sirius once, Hermione was beside herself with fear that it would happen again. It was logical that he tail her, she was probably the most dangerous of all the death eaters and Sirius knew her best. She was crazy, unpredictable and very, very smart. Sirius probably had the most dangerous mission of all.

Well, the most dangerous of the missions the Order had handed out. Hermione and Ron were going with Harry to fulfill the prophecy, they weren't even sure what lay ahead of them. The Order had taken care of the horcruxes, the only things left were Nagini and Voldemort himself.

The Trio knew that Dumbledore was trying to spare Harry in vain. The only thing that would come of it was more deaths, more pain, more pieces to pick up later. The battlefield was set, Harry knew Voldemort would come looking for him. They were as ready as they could possibly be.

Hermione had filled Harry and Ron in on all she knew. Unbeknownst to Dumbledore the Trio had been conversing with the mirror Sirius had given Harry. Hermione had repaired it and then stolen its mate from Sirius.

The future was hanging by a thread, the next few hours would decide the fate for the wizarding world as well as individual lives. There was no guarantee that any of them would return from the field of battle. The things left unsaid between Hermione and Sirius weighed heavily on her heart.

Hermione heard a noise on the stairs and felt a moment of panic, she ran to see who it was and groaned in frustration. "Rita," she said, darkly.

A moment later Rita Skeeter wandered into the drawing room, she looked at Hermione and noticed several things. Hermione was agitated, pacing back and forth and kept looking at a letter on a table. Rita read people well and knew something was up with the girl.

"So," said Rita, some of the snap had returned to her voice. "You and dear Sirius, well I never would have guessed it."

"Well, you never can tell," said Hermione absentmindedly, clearly distracted.

"True," agreed Rita. "Affairs of the heart and all."

"So, when did you and Sirius fall in love?" Rita was conducting the first part of that interview.

Hermione wasn't stupid, she looked at Rita and huffily left the room for the kitchen. Rita watched her leave and walked over to the letter. She picked it up and read it, all the color drained out of her face.

Dear Sirius,

I know you aren't going to understand but I need you to try. According to the prophecy Harry has to face Voldemort, the only way to defeat Voldemort is for Harry to defeat him. I know the Order is trying to protect him from that but it isn't possible.

Harry, Ron and I have faced many dangers and we always did it together. Ron and I can't let Harry face this last challenge alone. You wouldn't have done any less for James or Remus, please understand why I have to do this.

I love you with all my heart,

Hermione

Rita stormed into the kitchen, letter in hand. Hermione was stirring a cup of tea and looking intently into a little mirror.

“Have you lost your mind?” Rita slammed the letter down onto the table.

“No,” said Hermione coolly. “But I wouldn’t expect you to understand.”

“So the rumors are true, Harry is the chosen one. What does that have to with you?” Rita genuinely liked Sirius, she might detest this girl but if anything happened to her Sirius would be crushed.

“I don’t have to explain myself to you.” Hermione calmly drank her tea, she wouldn’t be goaded into telling Rita a thing.

“Hermione! Are you there?” Harry’s voice came from the mirror.

“Hold on Harry!” Hermione spoke into the mirror. She raised her wand against Rita, who wasn’t at all ready. “PetrificusTotalis!” Rita Skeeter fell to floor, stiff as a board.

Hermione ran into the drawing room. “Where Harry?”

“Dumbledore’s office, hurry!” Hermione threw floo powder into the fireplace and was swept away in whirling green flames.

Less than a minute later the front open and closed as someone came in. Sirius sprinted into his childhood home calling happily out to his wife. The smile left his face when he found Rita on the kitchen floor. He released the spell and helped Rita to her feet.

“What happened? Where’s Hermione?” Rita cringed at the panic in Sirius’ voice. She picked up the letter and handed it to him.

“Dammit!” Sirius slammed his fist onto the table causing Rita to jump. “Where did she go?”

“She wouldn’t let me hear, she was talking into a mirror to Harry Potter.” Rita was backing away from Sirius, she had never seen him so angry. He more closely resembled the escapee from the wanted posters than she had ever seen him.

“Did she leave out the front?” Sirius’ voice was angry but eerily calm.

“N-no,” stammered Rita. “Floo, I think.”

“Hogwarts,” muttered Sirius darkly. He flicked his wand and sent three patronuses in three different directions. “Stay here,” he ordered to Rita.

“Was I going somewhere?”

Sirius rolled his eyes at her and walked out of the kitchen. Rita followed hot on his heels. Sirius grabbed a handful of floo, Rita’s hand on his arm made him pause. “You aren’t going after her, you could be killed!”

“Wouldn’t be the first time.” Sirius pulled his arm out of her grasp and threw in the powder, he was gone in a whirl of green flames.

0o0o0o0o0o0o0o0o0

Hermione, Ron and Harry stood along the edge of the Forbidden Forest. Hermione was creating ten look alike golems for Harry and one each for herself and Ron. She was trying to hurry, they were well hidden but time was running short. They had already seen death eaters scouting out the school grounds, they had done well not to be spotted.

Harry was squatting with his head in his hands while Ron kept an eye on the wards.

“He’s coming.” Harry stood, still rubbing his scar. “Are you ready, Hermione?”

“Yes, all done.” To the casual observer, in the light of the waning moon, it would appear that there were fifteen people. In truth there were only three, the Harry golems set out in different directions, they were meant to draw fire away from the real Harry who had to live.

Hermione scanned the scene laid out before them, she could see how the lines of battle were set up. They were coming up from the side, to the right was the castle and its defenders, to the left was Voldemort and the death eaters.

Something had happened, the lines began to run at each other, curses were flying from both sides. The Trio kept their eyes sharp, looking for the visage of Voldemort. Neither side had spotted them yet, they moved forward slowly but with purpose.

Ron spotted Voldemort first, the first of the curses came flying toward them. Hermione ducked a Killing Curse. It had come from none other than Bellatrix Lestrange.

“Get away from my wife, Bella.” Hermione’s head whipped around, Sirius was standing tall, his wand drawn down on Bellatrix Lestrange.

Bellatrix grinned maniacally, instead of answering Sirius she pointed her wand at Hermione and shrieked, “AvadaKedavra!”

[illegible]

A/N: Thank you for the reviews!

Well, I'm almost done. There are 2 maybe 3 chapters left to go.

Everybody loved Hermione confessing to Sirius, made me feel bad for what I was about to do...

Please Review!

Mine

Hermione's golem stepped in front of her and took the full force of the blast. Hermione herself fell to the ground, dropping her wand. Bellatrix moved in for the kill.

"You'll pay for my nephew!" She shrieked, the madness evident in her wild eyes.

Bellatrix raised her wand again but before she could speak the words a jet of red light hit her square in the chest. She turned to her cousin, the surprise on her face was clear. She crumpled to the ground in a heap.

Sirius ran forward, ignorant of the battle raging around him. He ran up to Hermione, "Are you mad, Hermione!"

"I thought she was gonna kill me! If you hadn't been there..." Hermione pulled herself together, now was not the time.

Sirius removed Bellatrix's wand, broke it and then bound her magically.

"Where's Harry?" Demanded Sirius, he and Dumbledore had envisioned a more controlled environment for this to take place in.

Hermione looked around and gasped, Harry had just squared off with Voldemort. The snake Nagini lay dead at Ron's feet. "Its time," she whispered.

Together Sirius and Hermione dueled death eaters as they pressed their way closer to Harry and Voldemort. Hermione and Sirius' plan for the golems was working out well. Some of the vaguely human golems were successful at disarming death eaters, others were willing sacrifices, protecting the lives they were intended to.

Voldemort was terribly confused by the Harry golems so much so that he didn't block when the real Harry disarmed him. A cheer roared up

from the right hand side of the battle, the death eaters closed ranks around their wandless leader.

Voldemort yanked Lucius Malfoy's wand out of his hand, he shot a Killing Curse at Harry who exploded into a mound of dirt. Voldemort shrieked his frustration, the wand in his hand suddenly went flying as he had again been disarmed.

"You're weak, Harry. You don't have what it takes to kill." Voldemort stole another wand from a death eater and exploded another Harry golem.

"Eventually Harry, you will run out of golems, very clever of you but it won't save you."

Voldemort sent a volley of spells at the remaining Harrys, most of whom exploded. The real Harry put up a Shield Charm and was thus discovered.

"I have you now, Harry Potter." Hissed Voldemort, his smile was sickening to behold. He and Harry shouted a spell at each other at the same time. The two powerful spells met in the middle, colliding and rebounding. Each man was blown back against the ground and then lay still. The battle lay forgotten as each side rushed to their champion.

Sirius surged forward and dropped to the ground next to Harry's body, he felt for a pulse. Hermione was at his side, cradling Harry's head in her lap.

"Enervate!" Murmured Sirius, after which Harry began to stir.

"Look lively!" Cautioned Ron, coming up from behind.

Sirius and Hermione remembered the company they were in and regarded the death eaters they shared the field with warily, wands drawn. The death eaters looked uneasy which turned quickly into panic as Harry struggled to his feet. Voldemort was still down and wasn't moving.

Ministry officials charged onto the field, once there they seemed unsure what course of action to take. The aurors on the right hand side of the field stepped out and met with the officials, taking charge of the situation.

The remaining death eaters began to put up a weak fight, they put themselves in front of the apparently lifeless body of Voldemort, unwilling to let the other side call him dead.

Sirius stepped away from Ron, Harry and Hermione to inform the aurors of the whereabouts of Bellatrix Lestrange. He turned back to Hermione in time to see her being dragged away with Ginny Weasley by Molly Weasley. Sirius cursed under his breath, he so wanted to put his hands on Hermione, to see for himself that she was alright.

He looked for Harry, walked over and drew him into a manly hug. "I'm proud of you, son."

Harry had never looked happier.

0o0o0o0o0o0o0o0o0

The grounds of Hogwarts were swarming with ministry officials, if things weren't so helter skelter Hermione would have realized that this fact put her in some danger. Sirius learned too late from Kingsley Shacklebolt that they would be looking for her. He frantically searched the grounds, calling out to her, to Molly and to Ginny. Ron, Harry and Remus searched with him.

Hermione was in the infirmary of Hogwarts when the ministry officials came looking for her. They caught up to her before she could get away. She was confused as to why they would be looking for her until she remembered that the ministry hadn't been cleaned out yet.

They asked to see her wedding band and then performed a complicated charm. A list of the times she and Sirius had coupled were displayed in the air, complete with dates, times and number of incidents. Hermione was mortified.

The ministry officials weren't pleased with their findings, Hermione hadn't missed a single week of sexual intercourse with Sirius. Hermione was close to tears, she had never felt more humiliated in her entire life.

Sirius barged into the infirmary, enraged by the look on Hermione's face. "What are you doing to my wife?" Snarled Sirius as he strode forward, pulling Hermione away from the officials. Harry, Ron and Remus were hot on his heels.

"We were checking to see that your wife was in compliance. We're taking a group to Azkaban tonight, we didn't want to leave anybody out." The senior official was seething, affronted that Sirius would dare take offence.

"Don't you have your hands full?" Queried Harry, amazed that with all the death eaters under arrest they would bother with a student whose only potential crime was a lack of sex.

Molly Weasley returned to the infirmary with Ginny in tow, she had only left for a moment. "What's going on here?"

Seeing that they were outnumbered and without grounds for arrest the ministry officials backed down and left. The second they were out of sight Hermione broke into sobs. Sirius encircled her in his arms and kissed the top of her head.

"I'm sorry, Hermione. Are you alright?" Sirius' voice was a tender whisper.

Hermione didn't get a chance to answer because the injured were being brought into the infirmary for care. Several workers from St. Mungo's were with them, having just participated in the fight themselves. The small infirmary was quickly filling to capacity and since neither Hermione nor Sirius had any medical training they left to make more room. They were joined by Harry, Remus and Ron. The five of them were talking quietly outside the infirmary when Tonks came running up. She flung herself at Remus, knocking them both over.

“Oh, I’m sorry. Its just, well...you’re alright. I was so worried.” Remus stood and gave her a hand up.

“Aside from being knocked over,” he joked lightly. Tonks blushed deeply and apologized.

A weary looking Dumbledore ambled over and greeted them warmly, he seemed tired and older than he ever had. He informed them that the ministry and the aurors had taken control of the situation and that he was going to bed. He asked if anyone wanted to use his fireplace to return to number twelve, Grimmauld Place.

Sirius whispered in Hermione’s ear, “You’re coming home with me.”

She smiled weakly and nodded, there was no place she would rather be.

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Hermione was tired but still keyed up from the battle, so when he got her home the first thing she did was head toward the kitchen to make tea. She was keenly aware of his presence at her back, they still hadn’t dealt with her words to him. She wasn’t sure if now was the right time. She barely made it two steps into her destination when she felt herself spun around, her hands landing lightly on his chest. There was a fire in his eyes like she had never seen before. His intensity had always been mingled with doubt, that doubt was absent now.

“I love you!” He growled fiercely before pulling her flush against his body and claiming her in a brutal, bruising kiss. He walked her backwards into the wall and pressed his body into hers. He punished her with his lips for daring to put herself in danger, for almost dying right in front of his eyes.

When he finally released her from his kiss it took her a moment to catch her breath. This was a side to him she had never seen before, she wondered where this Sirius had been. She looked up to see him smiling at her with a self-satisfied grin. His kiss had her a little dizzy, a

lot off balance and he knew it and was enjoying it. It slowly dawned on her that he had said something very important to her.

“What?”

“I said,” he began slowly, his voice rumbling just above a whisper. “I love you.” His lips ghosted across hers as he spoke before plunging her into another kiss. She slid her arms around his neck and fisted her hands in his hair.

“Oh, Sirius.” Her voice was trembling with emotion, “I love you, too.”

“Are you sure you want to make that tea?” He was still smug and very much in control.

“How did you know...” He cut her off before she could finish her thought.

“Its just that I can think of five or six things off the top of my head that I’d rather do instead of drink tea.” He nuzzled her neck while his fingers ran along her sides and across the skin on her stomach. He didn’t give her any real opportunity to answer, his mouth covered hers again in another heated kiss.

Hermione just nodded her head, she was grabbing onto his shoulders for support, he had her weak in the knees and breathless. Sirius chuckled softly under his breath and picked her up and carried her to bed.

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Sirius walked down the stairs in his boxer shorts and nothing else. He was whistling a merry tune. He ignored the very pointed stare of Molly Weasley. He grabbed a tray and proceeded to fill two plates full of breakfast foods. He poured a flask of pumpkin juice and grabbed two glasses. He conjured a vase and a rose to place in it.

“You can’t lock her away forever, Padfoot.” Remus had to chuckle at his friend.

Ever since Sirius watched the Hermione golem explode he had become incredibly possessive of her. After the final battle, after Harry had defeated Voldemort he had holed up in his room with Hermione.

Still whistling his tune, having said nothing to his house mates he left the kitchen for the stairs.

“I expect to see that girl today, Sirius.” Said Molly Weasley, rather sternly.

Sirius just grinned at her and proceeded up the stairs.

“Sirius!”

“Alright, Molly.”

He continued up the stairs, he stopped in front of his door, balanced the tray in one hand and entered. Hermione was right where he left her, naked and waiting for her breakfast.

She smiled softly at him, she knew he thought he was watching her die. Had her golem not been as close to her as it was, she would be dead.

“They’re all asking about you.” He conjured a table and chairs. He set breakfast out and invited her over.

She stood up and threw on her house robe. “Looks wonderful!”

“So, Mr. Black, when do you plan on releasing your prisoner?” She took a swallow of pumpkin juice.

“Never, you’re mine. But I’ll let you out of this room if you’re a very good girl.” He leered at her hungrily, he hadn’t been able to keep his hands off of her.

One breakfast and thirty minutes later found Hermione pinned naked under Sirius on the bed. He was busy with her mouth and he was

taking his time. He had to let her leave the room when he was finished with her so he was determined to make it last.

“Do you remember the first night I made love to you?” His tongue was teasing the hollow of her throat.

Hermione released a soft moan before answering. “I was so scared. You were wonderful, I didn’t know it would feel so good.”

“I was so afraid of hurting you. I didn’t expect to enjoy it as much as I did.” He reached for a breast, massaging it gently.

“ You enjoyed it? I thought for sure I was...well...I don’t know...bad...” She apparently had given this a lot of thought, he hadn’t known about this little insecurity.

“Bad?” He chuckled to himself, mostly. “You were fresh, innocent...I was the only one there. I was someplace I knew I wasn’t supposed to be. There is something very appealing about innocence, Hermione.”

“Oh, I didn’t know.” She shied away from his gentle tickling, giggling softly.

“Exactly my point.” He licked at her neck and began to move slowly down her body.

“Oh, Siriussss...”

“God, I just love it when you say my name.” He licked at her belly button before continuing southward. When he reached her sex he kissed it before plunging his tongue in to find her clit. Hermione felt her body warm with the now familiar buzzing all throughout.

“Oh, God!” She moaned, “I love it when you do that.”

“I know,” he said cockily. “I know everything you love.” He took a firm hold of her thighs and kicked his tongue into high gear.

“I love you, you smug...oh, god...Sirius...” He pressed a finger into her and then another.

“I love you, too,” he chuckled softly. He began to pump his fingers into her, slowly at first and then in earnest. He swirled his tongue around her clit, relishing the sounds he could get her to make. He loved it when she came undone. She was so controlled most of the time but not with him. With him she was just a woman, he just a man.

She pressed herself urgently into his hand, she began to moan his name over and over until she was shouting it, begging him not to stop. He pumped his fingers faster and faster as her hips ground wretchedly into his hand and mouth until she began to shake. “I’m...I’m...” She never finished her thought, she was panting to heavily and moaning to much to get it out. Her orgasm hit hard and lit a fire that spread throughout her body.

“SILENCING CHARM!” Came up through the floor, carried up on Molly Weasley’s voice.

Hermione blushed, Molly Weasley had just heard them. She thought she would die from embarrassment.

“Ignore her,” said Sirius. He cupped her sex to help her calm down, he laid soft kisses all long her face and neck. “I love you so much, baby.”

“I love you too, Sirius.” She snuggled deep into his body, while she thought about what had just transpired. “Set the charm, Sirius.” He reached for his wand and did as she asked.

“Did you ever think this would be us?” She shifted in the bed so that they were gazing into each other’s eyes.

“Not at first. I remember the day I knew I was in love with you. It was in Mexico, we had just arrived and you and Juana went swimming. I watched you play about in the water and I knew...” He pushed her onto her back and crawled between her legs.

“It happened in Mexico for me as well. Took me forever to figure it out.” She let her fingers slide into his hair.

“I had a feeling it was happening for you.” He stroked her hair gently out of her eyes. He slid his cock slowly into her waiting pussy. He watched as her features registered the pleasure of his sensual act.

He set a slow, teasing rhythm while he worked on her neck and breasts. He wanted to touch and taste every inch of her, all at the same time. He would never be able to get enough of her to truly satisfy him. He loved being enveloped in her deep warmth, every time he pulled back he couldn't wait to plunge back in. He had to concentrate very hard to not let go and take what he wanted. He wanted this to last as long as possible.

“Tell me that you're mine, baby. I need to hear it again.” She was lifting her hips to meet his, trying desperately to get him to move faster.

“Yours, I'm all yours. I'll always be yours.” She thought she was going to go crazy if he didn't stop teasing her and let her have what she wanted.

“Say it again, baby. Tell me one more time and I'll give you what you want.” He teased her with one good hard thrust and then went back to his ruthless torture.

“Yours, just yours, Sirius.” She wanted him to do it again, to thrust into her like he meant it.

“Damn straight!” Sirius lifted her by the hips and pistoned in and out of her without mercy. Every muscle in his body flexed with his glorious exertion. They called out to each other as they flew higher and higher together. Sirius let a stream of passionate filth escape his lips, she encouraged and praised him.

“I'm so close baby, I can't hold on much longer. Please come with me, come for me, come now.” The ball of tension he had so carefully built up exploded. She shook the bed while her pussy pulsed, milking

him of every drop of come. He roared her name as he came, his thrusting became wild and unsteady.

He lay her little body back down on the bed and collapsed beside her, pulling her close. They whispered words of love to each other as they caught their breath.

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Number twelve, Grimmauld Place was jumping with people. The entire Weasley clan along with Harry, Hermione, Sirius, Remus, Tonks and several other Order members were preparing for Christmas which was two weeks away. The house was being decorated by all hands and Christmas carols were being sung badly and out of key.

Hermione let Mrs. Weasley fuss over her all she wanted. Mrs. Weasley had seen the Hermione golem take the full blast of Bellatrix's curse, she had also seen Sirius run to his wife's rescue. Having them both safe and sound along with the rest of her family was more than she could have hoped for. She had taken quite a personal interest in their lives.

The house looked more and more festive as the day wore on, it was when they were close to finished that Hermione realized she hadn't seen Sirius for an hour or so. She began to search for him, wondering what he was up to.

She didn't hear his voice until she got close to his mother's bedroom, he was in there with someone else. She listened closely as she crept closer and closer, she thought it would fun to take him by surprise. She recognized the second voice, it belonged to Remus.

"I know its here somewhere, I wish I knew where that miserable hag hid it." Hermione could here drawers being pulled open and rummaged through. She walked softly, curious to find out what Remus and Sirius were up to.

“You could always buy her one.” Was she ‘her’? Buy one what? She crept a little closer, quiet as a mouse sensing she wasn’t supposed to be privy to this little interchange.

“No, its really quite stunning. I hate having to admit that there is something of my mother’s I liked.” He paused, she could hear him looking through things. “She deserves to wear something like that.” She heard more drawers being open and contents being spilled out.

“Do you think Kreacher made off with it?” She heard complete silence.

“If that miserable little...” Began Sirius before he was cut off by an angry Hermione.

“Sirius! Why can’t you be nice to Kreacher? He isn’t even here and you’re bad mouthing him.” Hermione stood in the doorway, glaring at Sirius with a little frown on her face.

“Hermione...I didn’t hear you. Sneaking about are we?” Sirius had a guilty grin on his face, Hermione sensed it had little to do with Kreacher.

Hermione chose to ignore his comment and let the issue with Kreacher die, she was curious to know what they were looking for. “Are you looking for something? Can I help?”

Sirius wasn’t sure how much she had heard and he really wanted it to be a surprise so he quickly thought up a lie. “My mother had the most marvelous collection of scarves, she was known for them. I just thought they would look beautiful on you.” He crossed the room to reach her, placing his hands on her hips and smiling down at her.

Hermione knew she was being manipulated, strangely she didn’t really care. The object of her affection was flattering her with his charm and it was working. “Did I spoil the surprise?”

“Well, just a tiny bit. Still you haven't seen them yet, why don't you let Remus and I try to find them for you.” He kissed her softly, turned her around and swatted her bottom.

“Well, alright I guess.” She took a reluctant step in the direction of the stairs.

Sirius relaxed into the doorframe and watched her leave down the hallway. He turned back into the room once she was on the stairs.

“Did your mother really have a collection of scarves?” Queried Lupin.

“Not to my knowledge, no.” Sirius continued his interrogation of his mother's bedroom.

Sirius dumped the last of the drawers onto his mothers bed, a small collection of boxes fell out of it. Sirius began to open each one and peer inside, his gaze met with disappointment over and over. “Where did she put the blasted thing?”

Lupin stepped into a large closet, Sirius heard a series of soft bangs as he put the mess of drawers back to right. He heard a soft gasp come from the closet.

“Find something, Moony?” Sirius sounded hopeful.

“Several somethings, I daresay you'll have to make a choice.” Remus was backing out of the closet with a large wooden box in hand.

Sirius walked over to help him, it was quite a large and heavy box. Together they set it on the bed, inside the box were a number of smaller boxes. Sirius began to open them, he looked thoroughly confused.

“I told you, there's more than one.”

“I don't understand...why so many?” Sirius scratched at the stubble on his jaw.

“Probably an heirloom thing, did she offer one to Regulus as well?” Remus picked through the boxes, admiring the contents.

“Not sure, she showed me, well, I guess one of them before I left for school that first year. Seemed to think I needed to start the selection early.” Sirius made a pained expression.

Remus chuckled at his friend. “So, which one is it going to be?”

“Well, I like these two...” Sirius examined the open boxes in earnest scrutiny. He set aside the two boxes he preferred.

“Merlin, look at this one...” Remus handed him a box.

“This is it! You found it Moony!” Sirius danced in place with a look of glee on his face. “God, look at all this excess. Remus, why don’t you take one.”

“I couldn’t...”

“They are going to sit in a box collecting dust.”

“Its too valuable, Pads. I can’t.”

“Well, don’t do it for me or yourself even. Think of it this way, this is a part of my cousin’s birthright.”

“You aren’t going to take no for answer are you?”

“Its unlikely.” Sirius headed for the bedroom door. “Take your time, Remus. Pick out the perfect one.” Sirius paraded happily out of the bedroom for the stairs. He stopped off at his room and then bounded down the stairs. He swaggered into the kitchen, quite full of himself.

“Find the scarves?” Asked Hermione sweetly.

“The what?” Replied Sirius, a bit slow on the uptake.

The last chapter will be rather short, after which there will an even shorter epilogue.

Please Review!

Holiday

Sirius was enjoying his second visit to Hermione's parents home a good deal more than he had the first time around. He was there by choice, by warm and friendly invitation, this time he wasn't the intruder who was about to rape their daughter. While that was far from the truth it was close to how he had felt that night.

Hermione and her mother were chatting happily in the kitchen while Sirius was getting to know her father better. Sirius took a sly glance over his shoulder, satisfied that she was suitably occupied he turned back to Dr. Granger.

"I know you're tired of hearing this from me but we are so grateful to you for keeping our daughter safe." They still didn't have a lot of common ground so Dr. Granger filled the empty spaces in conversation with thanks and praise.

"The situation has changed between your daughter and me." Sirius wanted to do this properly even if it was a bit out of order.

"Oh? How so?" Dr. Granger leaned forward as Sirius had dropped his voice a little to avoid being overheard.

Sirius reached into his pocket and pulled out a small green box. He handed it over to Dr. Granger, when he opened the box his expression softened. "Oh, I see."

"This is going to sound like a ridiculous question since I already have what I'm about to ask for..." Sirius ran a nervous hand through his long dark locks. "I'm in love with your daughter, I'd like to have the ceremony we skipped the first time around."

"Not ridiculous at all, I think it's a wonderful idea, Sirius. I know her mother will enjoy planning a wedding." He handed the box back. "I must say that is a rather impressive ring."

“It’s been in the family for several generations.” Sirius slipped the box back into his coat pocket. “The last Mrs. Black to wear that ring was my great grandmother on my mother’s side.”

“So, when do you plan on presenting her with the ring?” Dr. Granger eased back into his seat and smiled warmly at Sirius.

“I was thinking about Christmas, it’s only a week away.” Sirius had a pleased, slightly excited look on his face. He loved Christmas and couldn’t think of a happier time of year to propose.

“I’m glad things worked out so well between the two of you. I had my misgivings, mind you, but I’m confident that my daughter is in good hands.”

“I think it caught us both by surprise.” Sirius thought about Mexico and smiled, maybe they would honeymoon there, in style this time.

“So,” began Dr. Granger in a very business like tone, “have you given any thought to a career. A man needs work, Sirius.”

Sirius suppressed a groan, he didn’t want to have this conversation. He knew that the Grangers believed in the virtue of hard work. He wasn’t quite ready to give up all the trappings of his playboy existence. He did realize he would have to give Dr. Granger some sort of answer that didn’t ruin the good will that was built between them. “I have given some thought to it, Hermione has that influence on a person.”

Apparently he had said the exact right thing, Dr. Granger looked over at his daughter and smiled proudly. “That’s wonderful, Sirius! Well, I’ll be looking forward to hearing updates from Hermione on how that goes.”

Hermione peeked into the sitting room of her parents home to see her father smiling proudly at Sirius while Sirius wore a weak smile. Hermione giggled under her breath, she had been expecting her father to discuss Sirius’ future with him. Never mind that Sirius was only five years younger than her father or that he had more money

than he could spend. She was pleased to see that Sirius was wearing it well and wondered if her father was making any headway. She would never pester Sirius about it but she secretly believed he needed something to do. Sirius had little fulfillment in his life and the accomplishment of work would help.

“Hermione, dear...give me a hand with the roast.” Hermione turned back into the kitchen, she flicked her wand and levitated the pan and roast onto the counter for her mother.

Hermione noticed her mother doing that thing with her mouth, it always meant there was something she had to say and was working out how to say it. “Oh, just say it mum.”

“Say what?” Asked her mother in surprise.

“Ask the question that you are worried about how to phrase, just ask.” Hermione paused to smile at her mother, by the look on her face she guessed it was serious.

“Well, its just now that things are going so well between you two...I mean to say, is it too much to ask for a tiny little ceremony. Something that makes it a bit more...normal. You deserve to wear a beautiful dress and your father deserves to give his daughter away.” Hermione thought her mother’s words sounded a bit rehearsed, she must have been thinking about this a lot.

“Well...” said Hermione thoughtfully, “Let’s get through Christmas. I’ll bring it up once we’re past the holidays. Fair?”

“More than fair.” Her mother looked well pleased.

Hermione was greatly relieved that this second meeting was going so much better than the first. Her parents gratitude was going a long way toward accepting Sirius as their son-in-law. They only knew some of the dangers that existed for Hermione as a muggleborn in wizard society. She had explained to her parents the prejudices that existed in the wizarding world. The reality of that danger hit too close to home when she and Sirius went on the run. Dumbledore had come to her

parents home personally and explained the seriousness of the situation. He assured them that Sirius was a very cunning wizard and that Hermione was safely tucked away with him.

Hermione wanted to spend a few days catching up with her mom, maybe do some Christmas shopping together. Hermione had been receiving an allowance from her parents since she started Hogwarts, she never spent much of it and had a nice little savings built up. She wanted to buy Sirius something special for Christmas. She couldn't very well do that if he was hovering the whole time.

Sirius didn't mind the time away either, a little separation was good for them. He had plans for his time apart from her. There were a few things he wanted to take care of that he couldn't do if she were around.

Sirius bade her parents a fond farewell, she walked him outside to the back yard. Once they were out of her parents eye line he swept her up in his arms, kissing her passionately, whispering how much he would miss her. They broke apart and moved away from each other, still touching hands and then fingertips. When she was too far away to reach him she crossed her arms over herself and smiled.

"I'll see you in a couple of days." He smiled one last time and then disappeared with a soft 'pop'.

She turned away, into her parents house and closed the door behind her.

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"Do we really have to do this tonight?" There was a whine in Ron Weasley's voice.

"He only has a couple of days away from her, Ron. If he's going to have it ready by Christmas he is going to have to start right away." Harry was excited to see the home Sirius had bought for himself so many years ago. Unlike Grimmauld Place, his parents had actually

been to this house. He wondered if there might be some special memento of his parents here.

“Looks the same from out here.” Remus wondered if it would be like stepping into a time capsule and what sort of effect that might have on Sirius. He hadn’t seen his friend this happy since before Lily and James died, he hoped this wouldn’t dampen Sirius’ spirits.

Sirius was exuberant, he seemed to hum with excess energy. He was a little apprehensive about seeing his old home, it held a lot of happy memories, memories he still had trouble accessing. The dementors had taken so much from him and much of it he would never get back. He was determined to make new happy memories here with Hermione, his Hermione.

The four men walked up to the nice sized two story house, it wasn’t extravagant but it spoke of a man who had his eye on the future. Sirius hadn’t met anyone special when he bought this house but it was always his intention to eventually settle down and raise a family with a nice girl. He was still rough and rowdy back then but he saw what James and Lily had and it looked inviting. He’d always thought there would be plenty of time.

Sirius flicked his wand at the door and it opened, he stepped carefully inside and peered around in the darkness, the only illumination coming from the tip of his wand. The place was dusty and he could hear things scurrying around in the dark, wizard homes were things that shouldn’t sit empty and neglected for long periods of time.

Sirius flicked his wand about a few times and gas lamps sputtered to life, casting a warm friendly glow. There was at least an inch of dust on everything, he looked around and began to remember this place. He remembered James and Lily coming to visit him once with Harry in tow.

“You’ve been here before, you know.” Sirius said to Harry, with a smile. “They made the trip with you here once, before they had to go into hiding.”

Harry walked around with renewed interest, he wondered what that visit had been like. He wished he wasn't too young to remember.

"I remember that," said Remus. "We all came to visit..." Lupin trailed off, he'd suddenly remembered that 'we all' included Peter. He eyed Sirius warily to see if he had noticed but he didn't seem to be bothered, that is until he saw Sirius' fist clenching and unclenching. Lupin recognized that Sirius was trying to get his emotions under control so he said nothing and distracted the boys.

Sirius took a deep breath and exhaled it slowly, he didn't think about Peter if he could help it. Peter was out there somewhere in the world with no big friends to rely on anymore. It was rumored that he had been seen the night of the battle with Voldemort but not by Sirius. Sirius was rather glad of that because he would have been too distracted with Peter to be there to save Hermione's life, his light.

He remembered why they were here, they were here to put back together the home where he and Hermione would raise their family. He had lost every happy memory in Azkaban and he'd had quite a few to lose. He wasn't left with much when it was all over. She was helping him rebuild what was lost, replacing the happiness that had been ripped from his mind. They would build happiness here, happiness and love.

"Well, boys...let's get this place cleaned up." Exclaimed Sirius, he resolutely put the past behind him and looked to the future.

The four men began to do their best at household charms although none of them were very good at it. Not long after starting they were all coughing from the dust that was flying everywhere. The only one who was making any sort of dent was Remus who was sucking the flying particles into his outstretched wand. The other three mimicked him and soon they had the dust under control.

It was clear that Sirius had kept the place clean, with the dust out of the way the character of the house began to stand out. It was a lot like Sirius, friendly, inviting and rather masculine. It was fairly clear this had not been a woman's home. It was absent of anything frilly or

feminine. The furniture had clean lines and was comfortable, functional, even stylish but subtle.

His fascination with muggle culture was evidenced by the enormous stereo system, the speakers were almost as tall as Harry. Sirius had amassed quite a collection of muggle music, Remus was sliding his finger along a case holding hundreds of cassettes. Occasionally he would call out the name of a band to Sirius who would throw him a grin.

Harry looked around and realized that as un-girly as Hermione was, this would never work. It was too masculine, it screamed bachelor pad. Sirius was going to need outside help.

“You are going to need to get someone to help you decorate this place, this is not very woman friendly.” Harry didn’t mind it himself but he couldn’t see Hermione surrounding herself with this.

“Well, actually it was very woman friendly.” Sirius was wearing a very cheeky grin. “And I am getting someone to decorate it for me.”

“Oh, who?” Harry wondered if Sirius had spoken to Molly Weasley or maybe Ginny.

Sirius looked at him strangely. “Who do you think?”

“Mrs. Weasley?”

Sirius snorted, Remus looked over at Harry, sniggering.

Sirius shook his head and tousled Harry’s hair. “We’re just tidying up a bit, Harry. I’m letting Hermione go nuts on the place, anything she wants.” Sirius paused, “Although now that you mention it, after we give it a once over I may ask Molly to come round.”

They continued their scourge of Sirius’ home, it was as different from number twelve, Grimmauld Place as night was from day. This house wasn’t rotting in decay nor was it infested with magical pests. They had to get rid of a couple of things, it needed a good once over and a

little love. Number twelve, Grimmauld Place was steeped in hate, here there was just a little neglect.

The downstairs had a large living area, in his head Sirius was calling it the family room. There was a nice sized dining room and a generous kitchen with a bar. The house was full of windows, the light could come pouring in. The master bed and bath were on the first floor, upstairs there were three bedrooms and an open area. The house boasted a large backyard, the only thing it didn't have was a library. That was something Sirius had given no consideration to when he bought the place.

Sirius walked down the stairs into the basement and looked around, this could be transformed into a library, he thought to himself. He heard someone descending the stairs and looked over his shoulder in time to see Remus entering the room.

“Library?” Asked Sirius.

“Yeah, it could be.” Remus thought his heart would burst at seeing his childhood friend, his best friend so happy. “This is going to be really good, Pads. For both of you.”

“I think it is too. It feels like I'm finally getting a fair shake. She's more than I deserve, I feel lucky, blessed.” Sirius gave the room a last look before climbing the stairs, he had big plans for this basement.

After a couple of hours of hard work Sirius decided to call it a night. He asked if they would come back with him tomorrow to which they all agreed. Sirius was hoping he could get Molly to come with.

Sirius locked and warded the house and they all left together, back to number twelve, Grimmauld Place.

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“Sirius’ birthday is just four days before Christmas, so I want to get him two presents.” Hermione and her mother were walking past the shops in Diagon Alley.

“What an awful time of year for a birthday.” Her mother peered into a shop, magic would never cease to be a bit of an oddity to her. It was well suited to her daughter, who apparently was quite brilliant. She was proud of Hermione even if she didn’t understand what a lot of it meant.

“It’s a big one this year, too.” Hermione looked at her mother ominously and mouthed the words ‘forty’.

“How’s he taking it, well I hope. Forty really isn’t so old.” She herself was forty four and truly believed that age was a state of mind.

“I’m not sure, he hasn’t said anything. I had to learn from his cousin when it was.” Tonks had casually mentioned that his birthday was coming up, she and Harry had gone into action. There was a celebration planned at the Burrow in two days time.

“Well, I think he should get something from us, don’t you think.” Hermione grinned at her mother, pleased she thought well of Sirius.

Hermione passed by a wizards clothing boutique, a rather more upscale than Madam Maulkin’s shop. In the window was a most stunning set of everyday robes. Everyday robes for the wizard who was interested in dressing well. Hermione and her mother stepped in and into the shop to admire it, Hermione couldn’t help thinking it was something that Sirius would love.

He loved attention and admiration, he was a good looking man who knew it to be true. It could be a little annoying at times, he projected quite a bit of conceit although she suspected it was a cover or maybe habit. Her own experiences with him suggested he might not really like himself as well as he’d like you to think he did.

The robe was made of dragon hide that had been worked to flow almost like soft, heavy fabric. It was heaven to touch. The black robes

would look so good on him. Hermione peeked at the price tag almost afraid to find out, what she saw shocked her. Well, she thought, that settles that. She turned to leave when her mother placed a hand on her arm.

“You’d like to get that for him wouldn’t you?”

“Well, I can’t afford it so it really doesn’t matter. I’ll find something else for him.” Hermione smiled at her mother, it really was an extravagance. It was something he could easily afford for himself but she just didn’t have that kind of money.

“Why don’t you let me help you get it.”

“No, besides then I still wouldn’t be able to him two presents. I really want to get him something for his birthday.”

“Do you know what size he wears.” Hermione grinned a sly little smile, she had measured him in his sleep. She had been hoping to find something nice for him to wear and while this was perfect, it just wasn’t doable.

“Yes.” She left out the details of measure a naked, sleeping Sirius.

“I’ll help you get both, did you have something in mind for his other present?”

She actually did and it was the other present she really wanted to get for him. She planned to go to a muggle jewelry store and men’s gold bracelet with his name on it. The gold would look good against his tanned skin.

“Yes and it’s the other present that is really important to me.”

“I think you should get both and I want to help.”

“I still have everyone else to buy for as well, mum.”

Her mother sighed, it was obvious that her daughter wasn't going to give in. They continued their shopping trip, picking up something for every one. Hermione and her mother left Diagon Alley with several gifts in hand. She had convinced her mother, after much coaxing and cajoling, to buy Sirius a miniature flying replica of his motorcycle. Word had gotten out about his secret. He was popular as an infamous, dangerous and sexy wizard and the little motorcycle was popular with girls. Everyone wanted a little Sirius, it would seem.

Hermione smirked, grinning inwardly that she was the only witch who held his attention anymore.

Hermione found his bracelet, it was simple and elegant. She waited while his name was engraved on the front, she had a special little message on the back. She had spied a tattoo shop and giggled, there was something she could get for him. He would love it if his name was tattooed on her ass. She would never, ever get a tattoo but it made her giggle to think about doing it.

Hermione's mother noticed that she didn't have that second gift. She could see her daughter worrying her teeth on her lower lip, a sure sign that something was bothering her.

"We could swing back by Diagon Alley, there is still time you know."

Hermione smiled mischievously and allowed her self to be dragged back to Diagon Alley. She couldn't believe that she was allowing this to happen, she really loved those robes and knew that he would too.

She and her mother returned home to wrap gifts and enjoy one more day together.

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Hermione owled Sirius and asked him to meet her at the burrow, he hadn't seen anyone at number twelve Grimmauld Place since the night before and he was suspicious. He loved gatherings and reasons to come together and celebrate but for reasons he couldn't explain he had never made a big deal about his birthday. It wasn't that he didn't love the celebration of him, on the contrary, he loved it. He'd gotten

his feelings hurt on more than one occasion because his birthday was forgotten by Harry. He glossed over the fact that Harry didn't know when it was.

The entire Weasley clan, Harry, Remus and a few other Order members had all gathered. There were a couple of tables set out in the yard in addition to a table full of presents. Mrs. Weasley had baked an enormous cake in the shape of a big black dog and there was plenty of food and drink.

"I can't believe I never thought to ask him when his birthday was. He is one of the most important people in my life and I don't bother to find that out." Harry was really getting down on himself, he hoped that Sirius hadn't gotten his feelings hurt. It could be difficult to predict what Sirius was going to be sensitive about. He was very good about remembering birthdays, there was reason to believe he might like to have his own honored as well.

Hermione glanced at her watch, Sirius was late to his own party. Of course she hadn't been able to insist on punctuality, that would have been too suspicious. Just as she was considering sending him a patronus she heard a soft 'pop' behind and then warm arms wrapping themselves around her.

"I thought you might be up to something like this." Sirius couldn't suppress the grin that was reaching from ear to ear.

Hermione turned in his arms to face him. "Happy Birthday, my love." They exchanged a deep, passionate kiss that promised of more to come later. They broke apart when the twins began whistling and making wolf calls.

"Here," said Hermione reaching into her pocket and pulling out a box. "I wanted to give you mine first."

Sirius smiled and thought about another little box as he opened his present from her. "Oh, Hermione. It's wonderful."

"Read the back," she said eagerly.

[illegible]

A/N: Thanks for the reviews!

Well, I seriously wasn't being a tease, I had an ending all planned and then wouldn't you know a couple of special readers came up with some great ideas. I'm still working on the outline. My current outline ends with the next chapter. I reworked them to get through to the next part in this little saga of mine. I might take a little extra time getting the outline all worked out.

Please review!

Happy Christmas

After a long heartfelt discussion Hermione and Sirius decided to keep the wedding bands they were bonded with. Without the simple gold bands that adorned their hands they probably wouldn't have found each other.

Hermione and Sirius stood in the Office for the Control of Unmarried Muggleborns. The ministry had gone through an overhaul, anyone found bearing the Dark Mark was summarily dismissed and had an investigation opened on them. The aurors were very busy these days.

This particular office was an embarrassment to the ministry, they wanted it gone as soon as possible. Hermione and Sirius stood waiting for help, watching the bustling activity of an office being dismantled. The same clerk that had helped Sirius walked up to the counter looking harried, he had reason to worry that he would be dismissed when this was all over. Everyone else had already been chucked out, he had the feeling he was only there to finalize the ending.

"If you wish to get a divorce this is the wrong office." The clerk wiped his brow and eyed Sirius nervously.

"No, that's not it. We want the charm removed from the rings, please." Hermione spoke up quickly, she had seen the look Sirius gave the clerk.

"Oh, certainly. There's no one monitoring them anymore though." The clerk pulled his wand out of his robes.

"All the same," said Sirius. "We'd rather know that no one is listening in."

The clerk waved his wand over Hermione's ring and then Sirius', each ring glowed and warmed slightly and then went cold.

Sirius eyed the clerk with distrust, he waved his wand over Hermione's ring, casting a few charms to force the ring to reveal any

enchancements it might still have. He then did the same thing to his own ring. Finally satisfied that the rings were spell free, he and Hermione returned to number twelve, Grimmauld Place.

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Sirius and Hermione were barely through the door when he pushed her up against the wall, he stunned his mother's portrait before she could say a word. Hermione was a little panicked because she could hear voices from within the house. She understood his passion, they had never made love without the ministry looking over their shoulder before. She needed to get him up the stairs if she could.

“Sirius...”

“Shh...we don't want anyone to hear, now do we?” He nipped at the place on her throat that he knew drove her crazy. His hands were roaming all over her, he kicked her legs apart and pressed his body up against hers.

Hermione bit her lip to stifle the moan, he was making it difficult for her to think rationally. Hearing Molly Weasley's voice float from the kitchen cleared her brain a bit.

“Not here, Sirius. We're going to get caught.” She said in a tight whisper.

Sirius pushed her shirt and bra up and rolled her nipple between his forefinger and thumb, he reached his hand up her skirt and into her knickers. He dragged his thumb across her clit and kissed her hard, swallowing her moan.

“Remember the kitchen table? Just like that, baby.” His lips trailed down her neck, she whimpered to keep from moaning.

“Sirius if Mrs. Weasley catches us...” He cut her off with a kiss, the harder she protested the more he wanted it.

Hermione gave up, it was easy to do, she wanted him as much as he wanted her. She silently prayed they had enough time before they were caught.

“Alright, alright. But Hurry.”

Sirius grinned wickedly at her, he knew she wouldn't be able to resist him. He lifted her against the wall, she wrapped her legs tightly around him. He opened his pants, pushed her knickers to the side and slid into her moist heat.

Hermione had to bite his shoulder to keep from making a sound, he took her hard and fast, his thumb never left her clit. She kept her face buried in his shoulder, if they did get caught she didn't want to see it coming.

Sirius on the other hand kept his eyes trained on the doorway to the kitchen. He knew they only had a few moments, he felt her pussy begin to twitch around him. He pumped into her harder and faster.

“Come for me, baby.”

Hermione couldn't help the muffled moan that escaped as she came. She pulled Sirius along with her, milking his cock of every drop. She looked up in horror as Harry and Ron rounded out of the kitchen into the hallway. Ron stared, his mouth agape until he was roughly pushed back into the kitchen by Harry.

“Did you see that?” Said Ron loudly.

“Shut it!” Hissed Harry.

Hermione groaned, Sirius let her off the wall and she fled to the safety of their room.

“What's going on?” Called Mrs. Weasley who came out of the kitchen in time to see a Hermione sized blur scamper up the staircase and Sirius zipping up his pants.

“Sirius Black! What have I told you about using this house as your private bordello?” Molly advanced on him waving a wooden spoon. If she could reach him she was going to smack him with it. “There is an underage girl in this house and I don’t want her getting lessons from you!”

He had forgotten Ginny was in the house, he suddenly realized he was in a lot of trouble. Sirius made a dash for the stairs, swinging around the banister and then rushing off to his room. When he got inside he performed a rather complicated locking charm.

“I’ve got to start using my head.” Sirius was breathing heavily, he held his breath for a moment to see if he could hear Molly on the stairs.

“What happened?” She had never seen Sirius look so...afraid.

“Ginny Weasley.”

“What about Ginny?”

“I forgot she was in the house, she could have seen us.” He put his head in his hands, the sooner they had their own place the better.

“She’s already seen us.” Hermione was blushing.

“What? When?” Sirius was mortified, fun was fun but he didn’t fancy an underage girl watching him shag.

“We didn’t close the downstairs bathroom door all the way. She just loved telling me about that one. Had herself a good giggle.” Hermione remembered the way that Ginny laughed as she reproduced the sounds she and Sirius had made.

“Molly’s not going to be happy about that.”

Hermione was thinking that she wasn't thrilled about it and yet they kept it up. The places they hadn't had sex in yet were dwindling.

"Ginny wouldn't tell her mother, besides she's not far from doing the same with Harry."

"Oh, well done Harry!" Hermione slapped him playfully. "What? It's a guy thing."

"It's crass."

"Alright, alright. I'm sorry."

"Sirius, I love what we do but couldn't we be a little more careful?" Hermione felt a wave of dread over having to face the house and her friends.

"I'm sorry Hermione. I don't know what comes over me sometimes." He hated having embarrassed her, it seemed that he was always hurting the people he cared about by doing something he considered fun.

"Come on, we better go face Molly." Hermione stood up and walked to the door.

"I-I'm not going downstairs." Sirius was shaking his head, Molly was fierce in defense of her young.

"Coward! I thought you were a Gryffindor." Hermione put her hand on the doorknob and looked back at Sirius with a raised eyebrow.

"So's she," he said darkly.

"Sirius it's almost Christmas, we'll let her have her say and then everything will go back to normal." Hermione pulled the door open and gestured to him, beckoning him to follow her out.

“Fine, but if I can’t give you children after she’s done with me it won’t be my fault.” Hermione’s heart skipped a little beat at the mention of children. The thought put a smile on her face, she met his eyes for a brief moment. They both realized what he had just said. She had given a snappy return but he didn’t understand her, it was as if she didn’t speak English. All he could see for the moment was Hermione swelling with their child. He totally lost the train of their conversation. There was a long pause before he spoke.

“I’m sorry, I think I’m supposed to say something here.” He spoke softly and leaned into her and kissed her, his lips barely touching hers. He placed his hand over her belly. “Is that something you’d like to do someday?”

Hermione put her small hand over his larger one and nodded. “Very much so.”

“You make me so happy. I haven’t felt this happy in years and its all because of you.” He lifted both hands to cup her face. He poured his heart into the kiss, she was his light, his life and his future. He pulled back and smiled. “Come on, we’d better get down to Molly.”

Unfortunately Molly was furious, she lit into Sirius and Hermione fiercely. When she was done with them they retreated to their room to lick their wounds. Molly pointed out a few things that Sirius hadn’t considered. She railed against him for having such little regard for Hermione, to put her in a situation that led to such embarrassment.

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Christmas Day started early for Hermione who was helping Molly and Ginny prepare the meal. They were expecting a full house that day. In addition to the Weasley’s, Hermione, Sirius, Harry, Remus and Tonks they were being joined by Ted and Andromeda. It was guaranteed to be a full house.

Molly was still a little terse with Hermione and her only interaction with Sirius was to glower. She was understanding when it came to

the friskiness of new love but she drew the line at her daughter. She didn't want Ginny exposed to the Sirius and Hermione show.

The whole house had heard about it, Sirius was regretting his impetuosity and continued to defend Hermione's innocence. Sirius had a reputation for acting on impulse when his blood was up. He felt horrible that she was dragged into his bad behavior. He hadn't thought, he had just acted, done what he wanted to do, when he wanted to do it.

The Weasley men didn't follow Molly's take on it, the reactions were mixed. Ginny herself thought her mother was over reacting and told her as much. Bill and Charlie were surprised at Hermione and a little amused at Sirius. Fred and George still felt that Sirius was a kindred spirit and thought it was good for Hermione to loosen up a little, even if this was a bit much. Ron thought that Sirius was being careless with Hermione. Harry felt that too but had a harder time standing in judgment of Sirius.

Remus was only surprised at Hermione, it wasn't like her to be so thoughtless with her dignity. This type of behavior was well within Sirius' scope however as Remus remembered only too well. Remus pondered at the effect they had on each other. They were both happier but a good deal more reckless. He wasn't sure what would make Hermione pay more attention to what she was doing but he knew that Sirius tended to learn only through his mistakes.

The house was subdued for a Christmas morning, there was a level of discomfort brought on by yesterday's event. Hermione resolutely joined in the Christmas festivity even though she was still embarrassed. Sirius however was up in their room, brooding and berating himself. He had been careless with her and it was making him miserable.

Hermione didn't know about his absence until she ventured into the drawing room and noticed he was gone.

"Where's Sirius?"

She got a room full of looks but no one spoke up.

“Has anyone seen my husband?” Her voice was a little tense.

Remus spoke up, “He’s in your bedroom, he’s been up there for hours.”

Hermione made her way up to their bedroom and closed the door behind her, he was sitting in a chair, brooding.

“Oh, you’ve got to be kidding me.”

“What?”

“Sirius, please stop this. Come downstairs and join us. We all want you down there.”

“I’ve done it again, Hermione. I hurt someone I care about.”

“Sirius I’m just as much to blame as you are.” Hermione climbed into his lap and nuzzled his neck to make her point.

“If it weren’t for me...” He pushed her back, unwilling to accept her entreaty.

“If it weren’t for you I wouldn’t be the happiest I’ve ever been. This is silly, come downstairs.” She pressed her body close, refusing to be ignored.

“Just like Remus,” he muttered darkly.

“You are comparing that to endangering someone’s life.” Her voice was tinged with anger.

“No, well...I don’t know.”

“What we did was probably wrong but do you know how it made me feel?”

“Ashamed, embarrassed...”

“Sexy, desirable, wanted, needed...”

He looked up at her, she was starting to get through. “I wanted you too, Sirius. Right there, up against that wall, as soon as I could get my hands you.”

“You did?”

“Merlin, Sirius! Are you really this dense? You didn’t take advantage of me, I was right there with you. Now come downstairs. It’s Christmas and I can’t enjoy it without you.”

He reluctantly allowed himself to be led downstairs, he was surprised at how warmly he was greeted. He thought it would be different. He sat in a chair and Hermione promptly got into his lap and together they got over their little mistake. They laughed at the good natured ribbing and by the time Ted and Andromeda showed up the atmosphere in the house was where it should be.

Sirius was pleased with his gift from Hermione, he wondered how she had afforded it which led him to think of something else. He wanted her to have equal access to his Grigotts account, he decided to take her to Diagon Alley after Christmas and set that up.

Hermione was beginning to wonder where her gift from Sirius was, he was being very mysterious about it. He told her it was a big surprise and that she would have to wait until after the Christmas meal to get it. The suspense was eating her alive, she kept trying to weasel information out of him. The more she pried the better he liked it, he loved this little game.

Finally when dinner was over people began to disappear, she assumed they had gone to their rooms to sleep the meal off. It wasn’t until the house was completely empty of human inhabitants that she became suspicious.

Sirius called her into the drawing room, he told her he had to take her somewhere to give her his present. Hermione already thought the present must be quite something, he was going to a lot of trouble to give it to her. He gave her the address, she stepped into the fireplace and disappeared into whirl of green flames.

Hermione stepped out of the fireplace into a strange home, she had never been here before. It was filled with the people who had been at Grimmauld for Christmas they were all grinning madly at her. She felt Sirius wrap his arms around her. "Happy Christmas, baby. What do you think, do you like it?"

“What?”

“I bought this place year’s ago. I always thought it would be a nice place to raise a family.”

“Oh, Sirius.” She spun in his arms and threw her arms around his neck.

“This isn’t your only present, baby.” He handed her a little green box. She took it from him with trembling fingers. She opened the box and gasped. It was a ring, an engagement ring. The single large diamond was surround by emeralds. It was stunning. “How about we have that ceremony we skipped, you deserve your big day.”

Hermione picked the ring out of the box. The moment she touched it Sirius knew something was wrong. It looked like an electric current was running through her, the ring dropped from her fingers. Sirius caught her before she hit the ground, she was convulsing uncontrollably.

The ring rolled to Andromeda's feet, she looked at the box and then at the ring. "Are you mad?" She rushed forward with the ring in her fingers. "She's muggleborn, Sirius. It could kill her! Get her to St. Mungo's, get her there now!"

[illegible]

A/N: Thank you for the reviews

So, that was the end of the original outline. I'm going to work on the new outline and get Tasee1 to look over it. I have quite a bit of trouble planned for Sirius/Hermione. Should be fun.

St. Mungo's

Sirius stood in the reception area of St. Mungo's, Hermione had gone still in his arms but she was still breathing. The shallow breaths she was taking in were well spaced out and appeared to be a real effort for her. Harry was speaking to the Welcome Witch and it was taking too long. Remus had his eyes on Sirius, it wouldn't do for him to lose his temper here. He spoke quietly to Sirius, trying to distract him from the wait. Andromeda still had the ring in her fingers, she was anxious because she didn't think Hermione had much time. Sirius shifted Hermione in his arms slightly and took a step forward, he was going to speak when Harry motioned him to follow. Sirius hurried to pull up along side him.

"They're sending us to the fourth floor," said Harry quietly.

The four of them took to the stairs with Sirius in the lead. He sprinted up the stairs with Hermione in his arms, not using magic because he was afraid of a reaction. They burst into the ward, a healer took one look at Hermione and realized how much danger she was in. She muttered something murderous about the Welcome Witch under her breath as she took control of the situation. Sirius gave Hermione into the hospital's care, a team of healers took her into a room and closed the door. He was vaguely aware of the hospital staff speaking to him, telling him they would do their best for her.

Andromeda spoke quietly to Healer Hesper Stromwell who was in charge, she gave a brief explanation about the ring and the curse. Andromeda couldn't explain why Hermione wasn't dead, she certainly should be. No muggleborn should have been able to touch that ring and live.

"That curse hasn't been seen for years. How on earth did she come in contact with it?" There was a hardness to the healer's tone.

Andromeda explained the situation, that it was an accident, that no one had meant Hermione any harm. It was a gift, given in honest act of sheer witlessness.

The healer took a glance at Sirius, she shook her head. "I don't know how that young girl is alive." Sirius watched as Healer Stromwell entered the room where they were treating Hermione.

Sirius listened in to the conversation between Andromeda and the Healer Stromwell. He knew his twisted family was paranoid about maintaining blood purity, he never thought they would curse a ring of their own. Andromeda walked over to Sirius and lay a comforting hand on his shoulder.

"They're doing their best for her, Sirius. I'm sure she'll pull through." She was still in shock that Sirius would give a family ring to his muggleborn wife. Especially an engagement ring, there were no limits to what their family would do to maintain blood purity. Sirius was the eldest, the Heir, Walburga would have wanted a guarantee that he not sully the bloodline.

"I didn't know, I swear I didn't know." Sirius took a step back and sunk into one of the rickety wooden chairs, which creaked under his weight. He put his head in his hands and took a shaky breath. This was supposed to be the happiest time of his life, instead his sweet wife was fighting for her life, because of him. Harry and Remus each took a seat beside him, there was nothing they could do except wait.

Andromeda took pity on Sirius and held her tongue. She wanted to ask him what he was thinking about. It wasn't exactly a secret that the Black rings were cursed. It was a source of pride that only a pureblood witch could wear a family ring. "There are so many cursed things in that house, someday, someone should just burn it to the ground." Sirius laughed ruefully at her words.

Healer Stromwell walked out of Hermione's room and over to where the four of them were sitting. She asked Sirius and Andromeda to join her in a private office. She closed the door and sat behind her desk, a rather grim look on her face. Are you certain that the Toujours Pur curse was all that was on that ring? We've detected another spell but we can't get it to reveal itself.

Andromeda wore a perplexed look on her face. "Not unless Aunt Walburga added something."

"Is she still living? We can get the ministry involved in this, this is attempted murder." Healer Stromwell was ready to see someone thrown into Azkaban for this.

"No, she's been dead for some time but her portrait hangs in my home." Sirius couldn't believe his family was still hurting him, from the grave no less.

"Do you think you could get her to tell you anything? I know it's a long shot with these types of curses but it may be all we have to go on." Healer Stromwell had read of this curse when she was in training. It was associated with old pureblood families.

"It looks like I need to go have a little chat with my dear mother." Sirius stood to excuse himself but the healer asked if she could have a private word with him. Andromeda patted him reassuringly on the shoulder as she left the room. Before she left Sirius asked her for the ring. She closed the door quietly behind her.

Healer Stromwell conjured a form, a quill and a pot of ink. She paused before speaking, hating what she was about to say. "Mr. Black, I'm sorry...your wife, she doesn't have much time. She's been asking for you, we're sorry we kept you away, we were doing everything we could for her. Her body just isn't responding."

Sirius jumped out of his chair, he wasn't willing to let the healer's words be true. "There has to be something you can do!" The healer pushed back in her chair, the man in front of her had a desperate, haunted look in his eyes. "I can't lose her," he whispered, unashamed of the tears that drew lines along his face.

"There is one last thing we can try but we're going to need your signed permission. There are no guarantees, the cure may be nearly as damaging as the curse." The look of desperation told her he would go for it, that he would move heaven and earth if he could. Sirius took the paper and the quill and quickly signed.

“Why don’t you go see her before we get started. We have to wait on an expert in reversing Dark Curses. It will be awhile once we’re underway.” The healer opened the door for Sirius. “If you could learn anything from your mother’s portrait, it might be helpful.”

Sirius stepped out of the office and into the hallway, he was greeted by Molly Weasley who had brought Hermione’s parents for him. The hospital hadn’t told them anything yet, they only knew that something had happened to Hermione. It was with a heavy heart and a voice that teetered on breaking that Sirius explained the situation.

The Granger’s didn’t know what to say, they didn’t understand magic. Sirius noted that they didn’t seem to understand the seriousness of the situation and he was unwilling to spell it out. Sirius brought Hermione’s parents into her room with him. Something essential in Sirius began to break down when he looked at his wife. Her eyes had lost their sparkle although she did brighten the smallest bit at seeing him. Her color was gray, when she tried to speak she went into a coughing fit.

He picked up her tiny hand in his and noted that it was cold, so very cold. He lifted it to his mouth and kissed it ever so softly. She tried to smile but it came off as more of a grimace. It was clear that she was weak and in a great deal of pain.

“I love you.” Hermione tried to respond but he shushed her. “I know you love me, too.” She gave his hand a small squeeze.

Hermione’s mother and father walked around to the other side of the bed, her mother was trying desperately to hold it together. Hermione looked like she could slip away at any moment. Sirius conjured chairs for all three of them, they kept Hermione company, talking to her as if nothing so dire was happening. Sirius held one of Hermione’s hands, her mother held the other.

Harry, Remus and Andromeda sat outside the hospital room, their eyes were trained on Hermione’s door. Molly Weasley was pestering the staff for information. Every time a healer would walk out they

would look up hopefully but none of the healers would meet their eyes. Molly personally spoke to each one, trying desperately to glean information. They watched as potions were measured and brought into her, an important looking member of the hospital staff entered the room. He was in there for quite a while before reemerging.

Harry couldn't look at the door anymore, he stood up to stretch his legs. He turned down the hallway, the opposite way from Hermione's door, he looked up and saw someone familiar. Gliding down the hallway, his robes billowing about him was his potions professor.

Severus Snape ignored Harry entirely as he was greeted by Healer Stromwell. He looked over at Remus, his expression was one of utter distaste. Remus nodded to Snape in greeting which the other man discounted completely.

Healer Stromwell led Snape into Hermione's room. Harry pointed to what was apparently an obscenity to him, he looked accusingly at Remus.

"Aren't you going to say something? She's been touched by a Dark Curse, they shouldn't let him anywhere near her."

Remus let out a tired sigh. "Harry, no one knows more about reversing Dark Curses than Snape. He has more experience than any of the staff at the hospital."

"She's in good hands, now Harry," reassured Molly.

"But...its..." Harry was struggling for words. "He hates her and he'd like to see her husband dead."

"He's unpleasant, I know. I truly do, but he is her best hope."

Harry would never understand how Remus could place faith in someone like Snape just because he was in the Order. He slumped back into his chair, watching as the door to Hermione's room was quietly closed.

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The door to Hermione's room opened, Sirius looked up, the surprise was clear on his face. Like Remus he knew that Snape was rather gifted when it came to reversing Dark Curses, that's not why he was surprised. He was surprised that Snape had come at all. The enmity between himself and Snape was decades old and judging by what the boys told him, Severus was no fan of Hermione.

Healer Stromwell introduced Snape as the expert they had been waiting on. She asked Sirius and Hermione's parents to give him some room to work. In an act of great humility Sirius stood up and looked Snape in eye. "Thank you for coming."

Snape wouldn't embarrass himself in front of Healer Stromwell by gloating but inwardly this was a moment of great pleasure for him. He merely inclined his head to Sirius in acknowledgement as Sirius left the room. Hermione's mother stooped to lay one more kiss on her daughter's forehead before she left.

Once they were in the hallway they were met with hopeful expressions. Harry noted that Sirius was just like the healers who came and went, he wouldn't meet his eyes. Sirius didn't have any answers but he knew where he might get some. He pulled Molly Weasley to the side and explained what he had to do. He asked her if she wouldn't mind keeping her parents company while they all waited. She graciously agreed, thankful that she could be useful.

Remus looked up, he had been trying to answer the Grangers questions about curses. It was evident that they weren't being told the whole story. The Grangers had a vaguely 'well, its just magic how bad could it be' attitude. It wasn't down to him to explain the dire situation their daughter was in so he did what everyone else had, he danced.

It wasn't until he looked up that he realized that Sirius was no where to be found. He looked questioningly at Molly.

"He went to headquarters, to get some answers from his mother's portrait." Molly's voice held no hint of alarm.

Harry had been getting information from Andromeda about the curse when he heard Molly speak. He and Remus exchanged a distressed look. Both men struck out at a run for the doors that led to the stairs.

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Sirius held himself together until he made it to the street outside the hospital. There he leaned heavily against the wall and howled out his sorrow. He sunk to his knees in great, shaking sobs. He struggled to get his grief under control, only managing to do so by replacing it with anger. Without looking to see if any muggles were nearby he disappeared with a soft 'pop'.

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Remus and Harry made it to the street in time to see Sirius Disapperate. They followed suit and landed in time to see Sirius blow the door to number twelve, Grimmauld Place off its hinges. Sirius stood in the doorway for a moment. He had held himself in check while at St. Mungo's but now his anger had run far out of his ability to control it. The air around him crackled as he walked into his childhood home.

Remus and Harry were a step behind him, neither man knew quite what to do. They had both seen Sirius angry but there was something more dangerous to this. It was clear to them both that Sirius had lost control.

Sirius ripped off the curtains covering his mother's portrait and let them fall carelessly to the ground.

"YOU!" She shrieked.

"That's right mother, me! We're going to have a little chat, you and I." Sirius sounded calm to Harry's ears but there was something about his voice that was making the hair on his neck stand on end. He and Remus stood in the doorway, both afraid to get too close to Sirius.

“How dare you take that tone with me, you ungrateful brat, you blood traitor.” The portrait shrieked at Sirius.

“Well, since you so conveniently bring it up, let’s talk about blood purity, mother.” Remus could smell the fury wafting off of Sirius, it was only a matter of time before it broke.

“What do you know about it, letting that filth into my home, the home of my fathers...” Sirius cut her rant off with an icy, bored tone of voice.

“Do you remember the ring, mother? The one you showed me before I left for Hogwarts.” Sirius held the ring up for her to inspect.

“How dare you! You have no right...”

“I’m the Heir mother, remember? I have every right.”

“My dear, sweet Regulus...my only son...” Sirius cut her off with a derisive snort.

“Oh, yes...let’s weep over Regulus some more. Dear, sweet, brainless Regulus, blindly following your beliefs to his death.”

“Don’t you speak ill about your dead brother...”

“I’ve been dead, I’ll speak ill of them if I wish.”

“Sirius!” Remus spoke in a tight, harsh voice. “The ring, the curse.”

Walburga heard Remus, whatever she was about to say to Sirius was lost on her lips. There was only one reason why the curse would be an issue. She narrowed her eyes at Sirius, a smile played at the corners of her mouth. “Is she not dead yet?” Her voice was almost sweet and lilting. Walburga’s face held a hint of malevolent amusement, there was the barest hint of a laugh in her tone. Sirius was unprepared for his mother’s open admission of guilt, the shock registered clearly on her face. Walburga basked in the moment

before she twisted the knife a little. "I can't believe you actually gave that ring to a mudblood!"

"DON'T YOU DARE CALL HER THAT!"

"Oh, Is your pathetic heart broken?" Her voice dripped with false sympathy. "How stupid you are. I told you that ring was only for a pureblood girl." Walburga laughed softly, amused by her only living son's misery. Her laughter grew louder and louder, a spiteful sneer on her lips.

The walls of number twelve, Grimmauld Place began shaking, Sirius was losing the battle to keep his emotions under control. "There is something more, some other curse. Tell me or I'll turn you to ash."

Walburga paused before speaking. "Why not," she said in a haughty, bored tone of voice. "It doesn't matter. If she's still alive she must not have put it on but don't worry, my son, she'll be dead before the day is out." Walburga paused to enjoy the pitiable visage that was her eldest son. "That particular ring has a specially crafted curse on it. If you had done the sensible thing and chosen a pureblood girl that curse would have bound her in obedience to you."

"Is it harming her?" His voice was tight, controlled.

"It doesn't have to, haven't you been listening?" Walburga hadn't enjoyed herself this much in a long time. "I bet you thought you would show us. Give a ring to a muggleborn that was meant for a pureblood. You never truly considered what that meant, did you?" Walburga cackled in glee, pleased that this situation had worked out so well.

Sirius finally snapped, that piece of his sanity he had been fighting for control over slipped from within his grasp. "You misererable...you heartless..." Sirius raised his wand "Fiendfyrous." Flames that resembled a Chimera exploded from the tip of Sirius' wand. Walburga's portrait disintegrated into a pile of soot.

“Sirius! No!” Lupin rushed forward, dragging Sirius out. Sirius threw the ring into the fire but Lupin batted it back out the house and into the street. “You fool! They’re going to need that ring.”

The flame Chimera multiplied into two and then a flame dragon. The fiery beasts devoured the walls, moving deeper and deeper into the house.

Harry gawked in staggering disbelief. The flames that licked at the house his godfather had gifted him with cavorted about, taking on the form of fiery beasts. Harry didn’t know what to do but it was clear they needed outside help, he left to go and get Dumbledore. If anyone could get this fire under control it was him.

Sirius broke free of Lupin and rushed back into the house, running through and cursing each portrait in turn. The house was soon raging out of control. If she was going to die, he wanted to go with her. He never wanted to be parted with her, not even for a second. He looked around with satisfaction as his childhood home was slowly reduced to ashes. He waited for the flames to take him. Remus rushed up to Sirius and punched him in the face, knocking him out. He roughly dragged Sirius out of the house and into the street. Remus sunk to his knees, his lungs full of ash and smoke, coughing and spitting. Sirius slowly came to, rubbing a sore spot on his face. He looked up from his position on the ground, he stared at the Most Noble and Ancient House of Black and watched it burn.

There were loud, thunderous bangs and pops followed by aftershock waves of light as one by one the fire broke the wards and protections on the house. The fire beasts continued their assault on the house multiplying on themselves as they began to threatening the neighboring muggle homes. Number twelve, Grimmauld place burned, naked to the world, open for anyone to see.

Residents of the neighboring homes poured into the street, scarcely able to comprehend what they were witnessing. Several were rubbing their eyes before taking a second look, as if to confirm the shapes that were frolicking in the burnt out ruin of number twelve.

There were two loud 'pops', Harry had returned with Dumbledore. The elderly wizard looked at the former headquarters in utter disbelief. He raised his wand and walked into the house, trying to avoid the flames as he attempted to get the blaze under control.

Moments after Dumbledore entered a team of ministry workers arrived who had been alerted to the fact that magic was being openly witnessed by muggles. They rushed into number twelve, joining in Dumbledore's attempt to douse the flames. Several patronuses were seen flying from the scene as more help was called in.

Harry looked at his godfather, who was covered in ash and bleeding from the nose. He was grief stricken for Hermione, he truly was but he couldn't see how burning number twelve was helping matters. Harry got another shock when Remus punched Sirius, again.

"Are you trying to get yourself killed?" Remus tried to shout but it left him with a coughing fit.

"Actually, yeah. Thanks ever so much for ruining that." Sirius turned away from Remus in time to see Harry's hurt expression. "Oh, what do you know of it," snarled Sirius, at his godson.

"What about Hermione?" Harry couldn't fathom why Sirius would want to leave her at a time when she needed him the most.

"Because," began Remus, his voice was hard and edgy. "Sirius doesn't believe she is going to make it."

"What if she does, Sirius? What if she does and you weren't there to help her?" Harry paced back and forth, he stood staring at Sirius before lunging at his godfather. Remus pulled Harry away, keeping him from finishing the attack. "So is that it?" Yelled Harry accusingly. "You just give up?" He pushed Remus off of him. "Well, not me. I won't and you shouldn't either."

In the midst of their quarrel their attention was pulled back to the broken, burning house. Dumbledore could be seen trying to tame a

tempestuous, fiery dragon that lunged and plunged at the old man. With the help of the ministry the flame Chimeras were contained and doused, all that were left were three flaming dragons. There was a loud groan from Sirius' childhood home, the top floors were giving way, their supports rapidly reducing to ash.

A second team from the ministry rushed in and managed to pull out the first team and Dumbledore before number twelve collapsed on itself. Once everyone's safety was assured the second team rushed in. Dumbledore was on his knees, coughing before he collapsed but still conscious.

Sirius pushed his confrontation with Harry out of his mind and watched in fascination as the home of his father's was utterly destroyed. It took Dumbledore's weakened condition for him to snap back to reality. He took one last forlorn look at the burning wreck, wishing he were inside it. He was going to have to return to Hermione and say his good bye to her if she wasn't already gone. He recognized defeat, once again something wonderful was just within his grasp before it was cruelly yanked away.

Harry helped Dumbledore back onto his feet and Apparated the old wizard to St. Mungo's. A third team from the ministry arrived just as Remus and Sirius disappeared and returned to St. Mungo's.

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Sirius spent the night battling his demons by the side of Hermione's bed. Hadn't he been through enough? Life just took and took and gave nothing in return. The happiness he saw in other people's lives was denied him over and over. Sirius argued his case into the wee hours of the morning. Sirius begged and bargained with unseen forces. He asked the same two things over over, he begged to keep, to be allowed to love her.

Hermione moaned in her bed, stirring the covers. Sirius leaned over and smiled at her, hoping his silent prayers were heard. She smiled back but didn't say anything, she was just too weak. It was too soon to know if Snape's efforts had helped. He watched as her eyes fluttered closed as sleep took her. He leaned over the bed and

lowered his lips to hers in soft kiss. He stroked his hand over her brow and squeezed her hand in reassurance. The hospital had finally been able to make her comfortable, she wasn't in any pain. He had no sleep or comfort of any kind as kept watch over his precious, dying wife.

[illegible]

A/N: Thanks for the reviews!

Sorry about the chapter mix up. I accidentally loaded Holiday twice. Thank you to everyone who brought it to my attention.

So, here we go...round two. I'm thinking it will be somewhere in the neighborhood of 15 -20 chapters all told. I've got the first 10 in a very rough outline so bear with me. This first chapter was easy to write because I had great help. Thanks again Tasee1.

I got great responses about the cursed ring. Thanks for those!

Please Review!

Consequences

Sirius quietly entered Dumbledore's hospital room and conjured a chair to sit in. There were no visitors and Dumbledore was awake, his intelligent, knowing eyes observing him with interest. Sirius closed the door with a soft click, he wanted privacy for this.

When Snape arrived to treat Hermione each day Sirius slipped out of the room to give him space to work in. In the beginning it was a chair between the two rooms. It was a few days before he could bring himself to enter Dumbledore's quarters. Now it seemed he lived between the two. It was rare that Dumbledore didn't have visitors which suited Sirius fine. He knew that when he did find himself alone with the old man there would be a reckoning.

Dumbledore was much stronger than when he first arrived. He had been incredibly weak until just a couple of days ago. He had sustained quite a few burns from the cursed fire and his lungs had filled with smoke. Quite a bit of care was required to treat the affected skin and ease the pain in his lungs. His first few days were the worst. Sirius forced himself to listen to the incessant coughing and agonized moaning. This was his fault.

Sirius was loathe to say the words 'I'm sorry.' The words were ridiculous when compared to his actions. Seldom in life was an apology so inappropriate and yet so necessary. Of course, it could also be pride.

Sirius was sat a full ten minutes, ten minutes of just staring at his hands, not knowing what to say for himself. He couldn't even bring himself to greet Dumbledore who was in this very hospital room because of his grief, his anger, his rage.

And it was all so unnecessary. Hermione was hanging on, she wasn't well but she was proving to be made of tougher stuff than his family had anticipated.

Dumbledore coughed to get Sirius' attention, for the first time since Sirius had walked in he raised his head. The older man was considering him thoughtfully. To Sirius it felt like a dissection. He had

an impulse to flee the room but he swallowed his pride and met Dumbledore's gaze.

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Dumbledore knew why Sirius came each day, several times a day, in fact. Sirius wanted absolution. There wasn't a student that passed through his school that he didn't care about. While Sirius was at Hogwarts he had been a regular visitor to his office and felt he had gotten to know him better than some. The fact that Sirius over reacted really didn't surprise him, neither did the fact that Sirius had allowed his anger to rule him. He understood Sirius because he understood children and Sirius' behavior was childish, childish in the way that children manage their emotions.

It was little wonder that Sirius lacked in sophistication. He had only been out of school and on his own for four years before he was thrown in a cage like an animal. The dementors had taken their toll on him. What was left to return to the wizard community was raw and damaged.

These things weren't Sirius' fault, in fact part of the blame for Sirius' tragedy lay at his own feet. He had given testimony that Sirius was the Potter's Secret Keeper, his error had damned Sirius. Dumbledore was mildly amused at how every act had a way of coming back around.

Sympathy was not what Sirius needed. What he needed was a swift kick to wake him to the realities of living, realities that didn't exist in the cage or in the over privileged world he'd been born into.

Despite all these truths, all these circumstances both horrid and advantaged; Sirius was a good man, or at the very least he possessed the crude material to become so. It was a loyal, loving heart that beat in his chest. Dumbledore did what he was best at, he looked past all the clutter and saw what could be.

"How is she?" Dumbledore had spoken to Snape yesterday about Hermione's condition. It finally looked like she was going to make it but there was quite a bit of damage and some of it was permanent.

“Better, they say...they’ve got the curse contained. She keeps having seizures though.” For the thousandth time that day a wave of guilt coursed through Sirius.

“I spoke with Severus yesterday, he seemed to feel she would only need a few more treatments with him.” Dumbledore read the emotion on Sirius’ face. As much as he would love to tell Sirius that holding onto the guilt wouldn’t help Hermione, it was really something Sirius would have to work out on his own.

“Tomorrow is the last treatment. They think she might come around today.” Sirius played with the gold bracelet on his wrist, his birthday present from Hermione.

“Albus...I...” The words ‘I’m sorry’ sounded so hollow, how could two words make up for his actions?

“It would seem that we are treading on familiar territory.” Dumbledore drew Sirius’ attention to another time when his anger had put someone’s life in danger.

Sirius winced inwardly, remembering how hurt Remus had been. He had exposed his friend, giving little thought to the consequences for either Snape or Remus. No, that wasn’t exactly true. He knew what the consequences for Snape were which made it all the more reprehensible. The most troubling thing of all for him was that he wasn’t all that sorry. He was ashamed for what he did to Remus, certainly but never quite managed to be sorry that he had endangered Snape’s life. If he had managed to get Snape killed, who would be treating Hermione?

“You can no longer afford to behave like a hot headed teenager with hurt feelings.” Dumbledore paused to let Sirius speak but he just sat there quietly, not meeting his eyes. Dumbledore’s eyes darkened in anger, Sirius looked like a boy suffering through a lecture, a boy who wasn’t listening and certainly not learning.

“Look at me, Sirius.” Sirius raised his head. “The events that shape other people, that force boys to become men, you missed out on all that. Your perception of the world was distorted growing up a Black and just when you were showing signs of turning into a fine man you were tossed in a cage and forgotten.”

“It is time to become that man, Sirius. You can ill afford to let your emotions run away with you. There is more than your life at stake. The girl in the next room needs to be able to depend on you.” Dumbledore paused, letting the words sink in. “So, I assume there are consequences, are you facing charges at the ministry?”

“Yeah, quite a few actually. My inquiry is today. Fortunately I’ve already served the time.” Sirius chuckled but his laughter died on his lips when he saw the look in Dumbledore’s eyes.

“It is not a laughing matter, Sirius. This is exactly what I’m talking about. The consequences for your actions are never realized by you!”

“I spent twelve years...”

“That was someone else’s crime! When have you ever had to live with the consequences of your own actions? Remus paid for your actions and Severus nearly died and what did you get? Two weeks worth of detentions that I am fairly certain you got out of. Even now, the consequences are playing out in other people’s lives to a much greater degree than in your own. It took three teams from the ministry to control the blaze, Harry lost his home and Hermione nearly lost her husband.” Sirius felt the words go through him, it had never occurred to him that he didn’t pay for his own actions. It was true though, the fall out of his poor choices was always worse in the lives of those around him.

James and Lily lost their lives because of his poor choice.

There was a soft knock at the door. Sirius was glad of it, the old man was right and he wanted to get away from so much truth. Sirius stood and opened the door, Healer Stromwell and Severus Snape entered

the room. They greeted Dumbledore and then asked for a private word with Sirius.

“Where are your wife’s parents Mr. Black? We’d like to speak with all of you if we could.” Sirius sensed bad news.

“Oh, uh...well, her father had to go in to work. Her mother is with a family friend, they’re bringing all of Hermione’s things to our new house.” Hermione’s mother and Molly Weasley were at the Grangers home packing up Hermione’s belongings. It gave them something to do other than sit around and wait, it helped them to feel useful. A long recovery at home was predicted from the outset, Hermione’s mother wanted her daughter to feel comfortable in her new house. “Can I just go look in on Hermione, is she alright?”

Snape held his tongue, did Sirius not consider that his time mattered as well. Snape took valuable time out of his day to clean up Sirius’ mistake. The only part of this that made it worth while was seeing Sirius so despondent. He had wanted to snipe at his childhood enemy a thousand times but he had the respect of the hospital staff and wasn’t willing to risk it by being petty.

“We’d really like to talk to you before you go and see her, we just want to bring you up to speed before Professor Snape has to return to Hogwarts.” It sounded reasonable to Sirius and it quelled his fears that something had gone wrong. Healer Stromwell invited Snape and Sirius into her office and offered them both chairs.

“The Toujours Pur curse is designed to shut the brain down causing instant death however she didn’t actually put the ring on. It’s the only reason she’s alive.” Sirius felt a shiver go down his spine, he was going to put the ring on her finger for her. She touched it before he got the chance.

“She must have just barely touched it. I was able to keep it from spreading. Where there are still traces of it I have it contained. I think I’ll only need to see her once more.” Snape glanced at the clock on the wall and made a quiet, impatient sound.

“Mr. Black, we still have to assess what the damage is,” began Healer Stromwell. “We know that the seizures are caused by the areas that were affected. She is going to have a little trouble with her motor skills and she may suffer migraines from time to time. We feel that both of these problems will go away over time. What is harder to assess is where the permanent damage is.”

“I am fairly certain that a small section of her memory may be affected. It will be impossible to know what she lost until she wakes.” Snape would be recommending to Dumbledore that Hermione be removed from school.

“Permanent?” Sirius’ heart sunk, of all the things that made Hermione ‘Hermione’, it was her wonderful memory. It was probably her most prized possession.

“Possibly, she may get some of it back.” Snape stood up to leave. “I must be going. Hesper, it was a pleasure as always. I will see you tomorrow.” Snape inclined his head toward Sirius and then left.

“Mr. Black, why don’t you go and see your wife now.” Healer Stromwell ushered Sirius into Hermione’s room. “Just a few minutes, ok? She is going to need her rest.” She quietly closed the door, giving the couple some privacy.

Sirius entered Hermione’s room, hopeful to speak to with her, to hear her voice. She hadn’t woken the entire week, he was missing her terribly. He just wanted to see her brown eyes open and maybe even a smile on her face.

Unfortunately by the time Sirius was through with Healer Stromwell and Snape, Hermione had already fallen asleep. Sirius spent the hour or so before his inquiry just holding her hand and watching her sleep.

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Sirius got out of the lifts and headed in the direction of the fireplaces so he could floo home for a quick shower before returning to St. Mungo’s. He had finished his business with the Department of

Magical Law Enforcement. He had plead guilty to all charges and was sentenced to five years in Azkaban and fined a hefty sum. The time he had already served was applied. He hadn't put up a fight, he just wanted to move past this so he could focus on Hermione and her recovery. A trial would just be a distraction.

Sirius heard someone calling his name, he turned around to see Rita Skeeter hurrying toward him. He paused to let her catch up with him. He was pleased to see that she was looking well, she appeared to be back to herself in typical 'Rita' form.

"I'm so glad I caught you, I didn't expect the inquiry to go so quickly." Rita straightened her glasses and took a moment to catch her breath. "So...guilty on all charges?"

"I need to get this behind me. Hermione is still in St. Mungo's, I didn't want to be distracted by a trial." Sirius took a glance toward the fireplaces.

Rita put a hand on his arm to pause him. "I've stalled my editor but I won't be able to keep this out of the Prophet much longer. Did you really burn Black Manor to the ground with a banned curse?" Rita was controlling the impulse to get her notepad and Quick Quotes Quill out but just barely.

Sirius heaved a sigh, he wondered why he hadn't read anything about his outburst in the Prophet. He should have known that Rita was behind it. Negative backlash from his ill considered act wasn't something he wanted to be bothered with. For the duration that Hermione was in St. Mungo's they would be in the public eye, it could prove to be distraction. How to explain his actions, that was the real question.

"It's complicated, Rita." Sirius looked and sounded tired and worn down.

"Why don't you do an interview with me, we can spin this in a more favorable light." Rita loved doing stories with Sirius as it usually got her on the front page, add a blaze at the family home and well...she

was drooling. "Come on, let me buy you a Butterbeer. I'll only take fifteen minutes of your time, tops."

Sirius took a moment to think it over, he really wanted to get back to Hermione. However it wouldn't hurt to be in control of the direction of the story and she did say it would only take fifteen minutes. "Leakey Cauldron?"

"Lovely!" She took Sirius by the arm and together they left to do the interview.

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Sirius returned from the Leakey Cauldron, he could hear voices coming from within the house. His mother-in-law and Molly Weasley were in the master bedroom arranging Hermione's belongings. Sirius leaned into the doorframe, a wry grin on his face. Hermione wasn't your typical frilly female, there were no unicorns or kittens littering the room for which he was thankful. He noticed with interest that Hermione liked flowers, a few new paintings graced the walls which stood in stark contrast with the otherwise masculine bedroom.

The two women were currently putting away Hermione's summer clothes and generally finishing up the unpacking. They hadn't noticed him yet, he cleared his throat to let them know he was there.

"Oh, hello Sirius. How did it go at the mi...er, how was your day." Molly recovered, badly, from almost admitting where Sirius had been. They agreed to keep the burning of Black Manor from the Grangers, there was no real reason to tell them and Sirius needed to be on good terms. They would hardly approve of Sirius' foray into arson.

"Great. I saw Ms. Skeeter and told her about my mother's portrait. There won't be any problems with the Prophet." Sirius filled Molly in without tipping off Dr. Granger to any potential problems. Sirius turned to his mother-in-law. "Hello, Jean. It looks like Hermione is all set. Thanks so much for this."

“Not at all, Sirius. The recovery is going to be difficult enough and this home isn’t quite familiar to her yet.” As soon as it became clear that Hermione was getting better Sirius sat them down and explained the curse to them fully. He finally made it plain just how serious the situation was, they knew how lucky they were not to have lost their only daughter. What was not revealed was that at least one person in the family knew of the danger while the other had blithely ignored the possibility.

“So, Jeanie...you want to go pay a visit to the hospital before you head home.” Molly Weasley found that although she was a muggle, Hermione’s mother was a delightful woman.

“Looks like were all done here. What about you Sirius? You’ve barely left the hospital, don’t you think you should take a little break?” Jean Granger noticed how worn and tired Sirius looked, as a doctor she sensed that the recovery would prove to be quite a trial. It would be better if Sirius not push himself so hard while there were other hands to help.

“I’m going to shower and wait for Harry. He and Ron are spending the weekend here so that they can spend some time with Hermione.” Sirius privately dreaded his next visit with Harry. He still had a few things to answer for to his godson. “I spoke with the healer this morning about Hermione’s condition.”

“Oh, lets go into the family room and talk about it.” They sat themselves comfortably in Sirius’ living room, Jean and Molly looked at Sirius expectantly, hoping his report held good news.

“The curse, the Toujours Pur curse affects the brain, it shuts it down. Thankfully Hermione barely touched the ring so she didn’t get a full dose. The good news is that they were able to contain the curse, it won’t spread to other areas of her brain. Its still there and probably always will be.” Jean Granger took in a sharp breath at his last statement. That meant there would be permanent, lasting damage. Molly Weasley sat quietly by as Hermione’s mother and husband discussed her fate.

“So, what are we dealing with?” Sirius suppressed a smile, he could see where Hermione got her matter of fact way of dealing with the world.

“In the short term she will have seizures, migraines and problems with her motor skills.” A look of fear passed across his mother-in-law’s face.

“And these issues will resolve over time?” There was a waver in her voice.

“Yeah and they have potions to help in her recovery.” Sirius put as much reassurance in his voice as he could muster.

Molly Weasley patted Jean Granger’s leg in comfort. “We’ll get our girl through this, Jean. You’ll see.”

“Alright, Sirius. Lets have the bad.” Jean Granger steeled herself, not knowing what to expect with a magical malady.

“Her memory will be affected, although its too soon to tell how much or what part. Now, bear in mind that this may not be permanent. Only time will tell.” Sirius couldn’t help but think that for Hermione, this would be the worst part. Knowledge and knowing was so important to his little brainiac. “There’s something I’d like you to consider and that is withdrawing Hermione from Hogwarts. She’s already missed so much, I worry that getting to class and managing her symptoms may be too difficult on her own. It doesn’t mean she can’t study for her NEWTs here. I’m turning the basement into a library for her. I’ll buy her every damn book ever published if that’s what it takes.”

Jean Granger nodded her head and let out a sigh. “We’ve been thinking pretty much the same thing. We’ll talk with her about it once she is doing a little better.” She gave Sirius a tight smile and turned to Molly Weasley. “Well then, Molly are you ready to go? Unfortunately I have to return to work tomorrow. Hazard of owning your own practice.” Jean Granger picked up her purse and turned to Molly Weasley.

“We’ll see you soon, Sirius.” Molly Weasley had chosen to avoid confronting Sirius about number twelve, Grimmauld Place for now. She knew he would be answering for it repeatedly by others and didn’t think she had anything to add. He needed support to get through this trying time which was her best way of aiding Hermione.

Sirius politely kissed his mother-in-law on the cheek and bade both ladies good bye. As soon as they were gone he stripped his clothes off and got into the shower. The hot water felt good on his tired body, he hadn’t slept in a bed of his own in a week. His muscles were sore and complaining, he was looking forward to getting Hermione home. Tomorrow would be her last treatment with Snape, he was hopeful that sometime next week he could bring his wife home.

Sirius emerged from the shower, dried himself and dressed. He hadn’t been home in three days, it felt good to be clean and in fresh clothes. Sirius thought he heard something coming from the family room and remembered that Remus was dropping by with his girlfriend and her mother. If he wasn’t mistaken he heard the sort of tight, staged whispers of people arguing who didn’t want to be over heard.

“Leave it, Andromeda! If I knew you intended to...” Remus sounded frustrated to Sirius’ ears.

“Hey, good people!” Sirius greeted his guests with a warm smile, it didn’t last though, he could tell something was wrong. Andromeda was eyeing him with ill concealed contempt, Remus was glaring at Andromeda and Tonks was looking from one to the other nervously.

Andromeda looked like she had something to say but Remus beat her to it. He asked Sirius how Hermione was doing and how he was holding up. Sirius gave them the same run down he had for Jean and Molly.

“Her memory? Like events?” Sirius could tell that this was troubling for Remus, he gave Remus a questioning look.

“Not sure,” said Sirius, cottoning on. Sirius had been so focused on Hermione’s storehouse of knowledge that he hadn’t considered that

her reckoning of events might be at stake. Sirius felt a chill of foreboding.

Discussing Hermione seemed to have a softening affect on Andromeda but she still looked irritated. Sirius decided it would be best to just take the bull by the horns. "What is it 'Dromeda?"

Andromeda was clearly surprised, she had been expecting evasive action from Sirius. "How could you not know, Sirius?"

Sirius sighed, his talk with his mother's portrait put it all in perspective. Looking at it now it seemed rather obvious. He had been so excited by the prospect of truly making her a part of his family and thereby making his family better in the process that he hadn't considered anything else. He was rather stunned by his own selfishness, he would probably spend the rest of his life trying to make up for it.

"It just never occurred to me. I can see it now but I hope you believe that I would never intentionally hurt her. I feel so bloody stupid and now...now..." Sirius turned away to get some control. He couldn't stand the way that his cousin was looking at him or that he let his sorrow show through. He walked away toward the kitchen. "Anyone want a Butterbeer?"

"That's enough!" Sirius heard Remus whisper loudly to Andromeda.

It wasn't in the nature of Black women to let something go, though. It was in the nature of Black women to continue to twist the knife. Andromeda was no Bellatrix but the two had grown up in the same house together. There were similarities that could not be avoided.

Recognizing that things could only deteriorate Tonks decided to diffuse the situation. "Mum, why don't we go see Hermione? Give Remus and Sirius a chance to talk."

Andromeda looked toward the kitchen, she didn't want to let it go, her daughter was right though. There would be no resolving this, only moving forward and living with the consequences. Andromeda

nodded her head, Tonks dashed to the kitchen and gave Sirius a warm hug, knocking over a chair in the process.

Sirius chuckled at his clumsy cousin as she wrangled her stubborn mother in the direction of the fireplace.

“We’ll talk later, Sirius.” Called out Andromeda, not quite able to let the matter rest.

“You bet!” Returned Sirius deciding never to find himself alone in her company again.

Once the women had left Sirius and Remus exchanged a smile, Sirius put away the unopened Butterbeer and pulled out the firewhiskey. He and Remus relaxed in the family room, sipping whiskey and enjoying the comfortable silence.

Sirius broke out first. “Harry will be here soon. He and Ron are staying with me this weekend.”

“That was good of Minerva.” Remus decided to hang around in case he needed to referee the coming match.

“Actually, he should have been here by now. I wonder what’s keeping him.” Sirius was anxious to get back to Hermione, it had been several hours since he had seen her.

“Any idea when she’ll be coming home?” Remus was worried, very worried actually, that Hermione may have lost a good chunk of recent events. It would complicate an already complicated situation. He wanted to see her and talk to her so he could put his fears to rest.

“I’m hoping next week.” Sirius glanced at the floo wondering where in the hell Harry was.

“I wonder what she’ll do with the place?” Remus knew that Harry probably wasn’t all that late and that Sirius was just anxious and jumpy, itching to be doing something.

Sirius smiled which pleased Remus, his distraction was successful. "No idea but I can't wait to take her shopping!" Some of the happiness from the week before crept into Sirius' face.

Remus was about to say something but there was a noise from the fireplace and then Harry emerged. He set his duffle down and gave Remus and Sirius a tight smile. Remus braced for the coming storm. Ron came through after Harry, less gracefully with a bit more soot.

"Watch the carpet!" Sirius was a bit gruffer than he intended.

Ron nodded his head and mumbled a 'sorry.'

"What took you two so long?" Sirius tried not to sound overly accusatory and failed miserably.

Harry jerked his head at Ron. "Ask him!"

Ron turned a bright, crimson red and looked at the floor. Remus and Sirius exchanged a glance.

"Well?" Queried Sirius, his curiosity piqued.

Harry looked at Ron, he saw that his friend wasn't going to speak so he did it for him. "Ron's got a girlfriend."

Remus and Sirius both let the air out and laughed lightly, a significant look passing between them. Sirius was pleased that the business of Ron fancying his wife was finally behind them.

"Well, get your things upstairs so we can get going." There was a bite of impatience to Sirius' tone. Ron and Harry bounded up the stairs and then back down. The house sounded like a herd of elephants had passed through for a look see.

"Ready?" Sirius wanted to get going.

“Just a moment.” Harry was nervous but he had something to say. Remus took in his breath and prepared to wade in. He couldn’t help but notice that Ron seemed a little uncomfortable as well.

Here it comes.

Sirius was bracing for this as well. He thought for a moment he might have gotten away without having to face Harry’s displeasure.

“Her-Hermione is my best friend,” Harry wasn’t sure how to say this right. “She’s like, like a sister to me.” Harry started to feel a little braver. “You’ve not been treating her right.” He looked Sirius in the eye when he said it. Sirius knew what Harry was talking about and it wasn’t just the issue with Grimmauld Place and his loss of control. He was also talking about what he and Ron had witnessed last week, just before Christmas.

Sirius could only imagine how uncomfortable and nervous this conversation was making Harry. It was with pride that he noted Harry stood up for his friends, even to him.

“I know.”

“Well,” Harry wasn’t sure what to say now. He finally decided that simple was best. “Cut it out.”

Sirius nodded, looking Harry in the eye as he did so. “Are we done, then?” He gave Harry a wry grin.

Harry smiled but it was a bit more solemn than Sirius had been. He still loved his godfather, very much but he saw him more as a man, a human being. A bit of the shine was off of Sirius for Harry and probably would be that way for a while.

One by one they each disappeared into the fireplace.

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Hermione felt groggy, her head hurt and she wasn't sure where she was. She tried to think of the last place she had been and this was certainly not it. There were people in her room but she couldn't make out their faces. The more awake she became the more her head pounded until she couldn't take it anymore, she let out a little moan.

She heard her mother's voice although she couldn't understand what she was saying. Hermione struggled to sit up, someone pushed her gently back down and then raised her head enough to pour some liquid in her mouth. The pain in her head began to subside and her brain cleared. Her vision became less blurry, she could make out the faces. She understood the words, she heard her mother tell her she was in St. Mungo's. Hermione tried to remember what happened, she thought it must be pretty bad if she couldn't even recall the event itself.

She looked around the room, she saw her mother and father and Mrs. Weasley. There was a woman in the garb of a healer who told Hermione that her husband was on his way. Mrs. Weasley told her how attentive her husband had been, how he had been by her side the whole week. Her mother told her how they had moved all her belongings to the new house and that she would be going home with him next week.

This time Hermione was determined to sit up, she felt gentle hands help her into a sitting position. She rubbed the sleep out of her eyes and then put her hand out to pause her mother.

“Mum, what are you talking about? I’m not married.”

Sirius stood in the doorway and felt his heart break all over again.

[illegible]

A/N: Thank you for the reviews!

Ok, see...Hermione's not dead!

Please Review!

Home

Hermione lay in the hospital bed, chewing on her lower lip. Everything happened awfully fast after she told her mother that she wasn't married. That was just under an hour ago but in that hour she was fed potions, questioned, poked and prodded.

The healers had given her a potion that might help her remember things more clearly, which she did. The problem was that it was the same point in time, just in shaper detail. There were no new memories unlocked for her as they all had hoped. It was the end of the year and she, Harry and Ron had just taken the carriage to the Hogwarts Express for the return home. She remembered the things they had talked about on the ride down, promises to write and see each other over the summer. Harry was already slipping into his end of year melancholy because he was returning to the Dursley's.

The memory ended with her stepping onto the train, not finding a seat or actually sitting down. Just getting on and then nothing...

If she concentrated too long or too hard on the memory she would feel an electric shock. Once when she was a little girl she had unplugged a lamp for her mother and accidently touch the plug before it was out of the socket, the buzz in her head felt just like that.

She could tell that something was there, she could practically feel the barrier in her head. It was frustrating knowing it was there and not having a way to access it. The worst bit was that after they discovered her memory loss everyone clammed up. They started asking her a whole lot of questions about when she thought it was, what her current living situation happened to be, where her last memory took place and on and on.

She knew with absolute certainty that her last memory was not the last event in her life because her mother had let her in on that little secret. She had also not forgotten about her mother and Mrs. Weasley making mention of a husband. This was the most disturbing fact so far. She could only assume that they were keeping him away because she hadn't seen anyone fitting that description. The only

men who had been in to see her were Sirius and Remus and that was just laughable.

Her first guess was Ron but she knew that was wrong the second the thought ran through her brain. She sighed, wondering who her mystery man was. This was going to take some getting used to. Hermione couldn't seem to stop touching her wedding band. There was something oddly comforting about the band of gold on her left hand.

She had no choice but to be patient and wait for the details of her life to be meted out. It was frustrating and irritating. She could only assume that there was a good reason for all of this but she couldn't for the life of her figure out what it was. She knew that something catastrophic had happened to her, just not what that was exactly. She was putting her money on spell damage. She wondered if maybe she had been hurt in the war against Voldemort, however that too seemed wrong.

Her thoughts were interrupted by her mother and father, she smiled at them both and wondered if she would finally get some answers about her life.

“Hi, honey.” Her mother took her seat, there was a worried expression on her face.

“Am I finally going to get some answers?” Hermione didn't bother to hide the irritation in her voice.

Her parents exchanged a look before proceeding. They felt bad about all the secrecy but they were trying to figure out just how much of her memory was lost.

“Yes, of course. We're not trying to hide anything, the healers were trying to assess how much memory you had lost.” Her father didn't blame his daughter for feeling manipulated.

“So, how much time have I lost?” Hermione braced for the news.

Hermione's mother smiled a little sadly before she answered. "About six months, dear."

Hermione didn't think that sounded so bad. It could have been worse, she could have lost years. "Ok, to whom am I married?"

Sirius had asked her parents if he could be the one to tell her, to which they had agreed. He knew that the news was going to come as a shock. It wasn't that long ago that they'd had to marry to keep her safe and he still remembered how awkward and uncomfortable that had been.

"He'd like to be the one to tell you that." Her father finally sat down on the other side of the bed in a chair that Sirius had conjured.

Hermione gave her father a look that said 'well, let's have a look at him.' As her father got back up the first wave of panic began to wash over Hermione. Her frustration and irritation had been pushing her attitude, she suddenly felt the bottom drop out of her bravado. She watched as he left, a moment later her father called her mother out of the room and Hermione started to feel slightly faint.

She was completely unprepared for when Sirius walked through the door.

Oh, god! Oh, god! Oh, god! Oh, god! Oh, god!

Sirius closed the door behind him and sat down. He was a lot less calm than he portrayed but he was pretty good at faking it. He braced for her to scream or cry or yell but none of that happened. Instead she started chewing her lower lip as she tried to decide which question to ask first.

"We're in love?" It was the only thing she could think of to ask. She had only lost six months and somewhere in that six months she had married Sirius Black. The only logical conclusion was that they had somehow fallen in love and gotten married.

Sirius raised his eyebrows in surprise. It wasn't the question that he was expecting.

"Very much in love." Hermione believed him, he was looking at her with such intensity. It made her sad to think that she couldn't remember any of it.

"So, what you're saying then, is that you're in love with me?" Sirius had to fight to keep the grin off of his face, she was adorable when she was working something out.

"Yes. I love you." Hermione swallowed dryly.

"We live together?"

"We just got a home of our own." He realized she was going to go through a long list of questions, he relaxed in his chair a bit.

"When did we fall in love?"

"Sometime in November, seems like."

"And when is it now?"

"Just after the New Year. January the second."

That was fast.

"Oh, so when did we get married?"

"September the fifth." Hermione gave him an odd look.

"We got married and then fell in love?" Hermione cocked an eyebrow in question.

"Uh, huh." Now he couldn't suppress the grin.

"That doesn't make sense, Sirius."

“The ministry of magic passed a marriage law, the law stated that all muggleborn witches of age had to be married to a pureblood wizard or they faced a year in Azkaban. So we got married to keep you safe.” Sirius watched her carefully for her reaction, he was worried she might not give him a chance, that maybe she would ask him for a divorce.

“That’s the most ridiculous thing I’ve ever heard.” Sirius nodded his head in agreement, he had thought it was pretty ridiculous at the time.

“Thank you for that, Sirius. That had to be difficult for you.” Hermione was completely floored that he would do something like that for her.

“Only at first. It has been utter joy being married to you, Hermione.” She blushed at his words and dropped her eyes.

“So I guess that we have...um...um...” Sirius rescued her before she continued with her stutter.

“We have.” Hermione was quiet for a few minutes as she tried to digest that. She had only kissed one boy and hadn’t given sex a great deal of thought. She took a quick glance at him and saw an odd look on his face that made her skin feel warm. There was going to have to be a conversation about this but it was better saved for another day.

“What happened to me.” Hermione braced, hoping she hadn’t been through something too horrid.

Sirius took a deep breath and hoped she didn’t try to hex him for this. “Well, as I said we got married and since it was only to keep you safe it seemed sort of silly to go through with a ceremony, so we skipped it. Then we fell in love and I wanted to give you an engagement ring and have the big day.” Sirius’ voice started to crack, just a little. “The Black family has a large collection of engagement rings and there was a really pretty one in particular that I wanted to give you.” Sirius took a deep breath, he wasn’t sure he could do this. He looked up at her and she could see the guilt written on his face.

“It was cursed, wasn’t it?” Sirius felt like an idiot, even Hermione, muggleborn that she was could figure that out while he just plowed recklessly forward.

“It almost killed you,” he whispered. Hermione could see the anguish on his face and felt the urge to wrap her arms around him and hug him close.

“But it didn’t, Sirius.” She couldn’t remember any of this but two things were clear. One, he really was in love with her and two, this was an accident, a mistake. She reached her hand out and lay it on top of his.

“So, tell me what else is happening to me. I’ve had a headache since I woke up.”

“They didn’t give you anything for that?”

“They did but its coming back. I did mention it but I think they were more interested in trying to assess me.”

Sirius swiftly stood and left the room, he returned with a somewhat frightened looking healer who brought a potion with him. His protectiveness touched something in her, it made her feel safe. The healer gave her some of the potion and she began to feel better immediately.

“So, I get headaches, what else?”

“Seizures...” She felt her stomach flip, that wasn’t good news.

“That sounds rather unpleasant.”

“You’re probably going to have some trouble with your motor skills.” It was clear to her that she was going to need an awful lot of help.

“Is any of this permanent?” Hermione held her breath.

“Only the memory loss.” She let her breath out slowly, that was bad, bad news. “I’m so sorry, Hermione.” She looked at him and saw the tears that were threatening, she had never seen him cry, didn’t know that he could.

Hermione heaved a great sigh, her experience with Sirius over the years taught her that she could expect this sort of honesty from him. She didn’t want the truth sugar coated or watered down, just the facts so that they could deal with the problem head on.

“So what is the plan?”

“Why don’t we bring your parents back in for that?”

“Ok.” Hermione nodded her head.

Sirius stood, he leaned over Hermione’s bed and cupped her face gently with his large hand. He lay a chaste kiss on the top of her head. Hermione felt herself warm down to her toes. He left the room and returned with her parents and Healer Stromwell.

“Glad to have you back, Mrs. Black.” Hearing her married name was startling to Hermione. “Well, I have good news. You wouldn’t be as lucid as you are if you still needed treatment which means after I take a look at you, you can go home. Why don’t we test your motor skills?”

Healer Stromwell helped Hermione off the bed and onto her feet. Hermione was unsteady and she had a little trouble maintaining her balance. She had difficulty getting one foot smoothly past the other and tripped. Before she hit the ground she felt strong hands around her waist, steadying her. Sirius’ hard body was at her back and his warm breath tickled her neck, she felt a tingle low in her abdomen that made her shiver. Thankfully, no one seemed to notice her slight discomfort.

“Don’t worry Mrs. Black, that will get better over time. You’ll just need a little practice.” Healer Stromwell sounded confident and it reassured Hermione. “You’re going to need someone around while

you recover though.” She turned to Sirius. “Is there someone who can stay with her full time? In the beginning she is going to need quite a bit of help with getting around, bathing, dressing, things of that nature.”

Hermione looked to her parents and realized that wasn’t a possibility because of their dental practice. They couldn’t be around all the time to ensure her safety. That only left Sirius who didn’t work, she looked over at him and smiled shyly. Oh, this was going to take some getting used to.

“Do you mind?” The look on his face said it all, not only did he not mind, he seemed thrilled at the prospect of bringing her home.

“Of course not, baby.”

That was going to take some getting used to as well.

Sirius felt his heart do a little back flip, although he felt terrible for her, he was elated for himself. He didn’t mind taking care of her in the least because it meant he got to keep her. He thought of his prayer by the side of her bed and sent a little thanks to whoever had been listening.

With Sirius’ help she got back onto the bed. She gave him a grateful smile.

“Sirius mentioned seizures.”

“You’re going to get those mostly at night, while you are falling asleep and waking up. You may occasionally have some in your sleep as well.” Healer Stromwell liked the fact that Hermione delved right in and faced the problem.

“How should I deal with that?”

“Well, we have a potion for you to take every day. Your husband will need to keep a close eye on you as you fall asleep at night.” Healer Stromwell was puzzled by the blush that was creeping up Hermione’s

face. She didn't know the timeline of their marriage. She turned to Sirius. "If she has a seizure during her sleep just wake her up and get her to walk around a bit, then give her this potion." She set a large glass bottle down on the table beside Hermione's bed. The large label on the front described the dosing instructions.

Oh, dear. That meant sharing a bed with Sirius.

Sirius picked the bottle up and read the label. He took a sideways glance at Hermione and noticed the blush. He turned his head away so she couldn't see his grin. He was a little ashamed for feeling so happy about all of this, another part of him was in rebellion, she was his wife. Why shouldn't he get to take care of her?

"What about the headaches?"

"Well, we're going to send you home with this potion," Healer Stromwell set down another large glass bottle with a big label. "You'll take this when the pain hits."

Sirius put the other potion bottle back on the bedside table and picked up the new one and read it carefully.

"The problems with your motor skills, the seizures and the migraines should go away over time. We'd like to see you back here in about three months for a check up. Unfortunately there is nothing we can do about your memory." Healer Stromwell conjured a form, a quill and a pot of ink. "Mr. Black if you'll sign here we can release your wife, you can take her home today."

Sirius took the form and read it carefully and then let Hermione read it. She was being released because there was someone to take care of her. The other option, she assumed, was a lengthy stay at the hospital. She took a glance at Sirius, she had thrown her lot in with him once before. Why not do it again? She handed the form back to Sirius, he signed and then handed it back to the healer.

The healer walked out of the room and then reentered with a bag. "Here are your clothes, dear. You are going to need some help changing into them."

"I'll do it." Her mother smiled at her. She was hoping to get a moment alone with Hermione before she went home with Sirius. The healer, her father and Sirius filed out of the room and closed the door behind them.

"Well, I'm so sorry about all this honey." Her mother stroked her daughter's hair.

Now that she was alone with her mum she could feel the emotion threatening to overwhelm her, she had been hit with so much, so fast that she had been able to hold it together. "Oh, mum!"

Hermione's mother wrapped her daughter up in her arms and let her cry. Hermione sobbed for all that she had lost, she felt desolate and uncertain about her future. Her mother soothed her daughter and whispered to her that it would be alright, that she had herself and her father and Sirius to look after her. Hermione pulled back and sniffed, she wiped the tears out of her eyes.

"I can't believe that I'm married!" This was the hardest thing for her to grasp. She wished she could remember something of her life with Sirius.

"I know. We knew that would be the biggest shock for you. It was best to just get that out in the open though, don't you think?" She pulled a tissue out of her purse and handed it to her daughter.

"Yes, I wouldn't want something like hidden from me. Poor Sirius, this must be just awful for him." She looked at her mother to see if she could read her expression.

"He seems to love you very much, Hermione." Jean Granger sincerely hoped that things could work out for the best for Hermione and Sirius. They had a bit of struggle ahead of them.

“Were we happy, mum?” Hermione let her mother remove her dressing gown.

“You told me that you were.” She pulled Hermione’s jeans up, snapped the snap and zipped the zipper.

“Was I really in love with Sirius Black?” Her mother put the bra on her daughter and took a seat in the chair.

“You were and I want you to listen to me. You need to give him an honest chance. You are going to need him over the next few months.” She looked her daughter in the eye, she needed her stubborn daughter to accept this.

Hermione nodded, she knew this and as much as she hated being dependant she really had no other option but to rely on him. “Wh-what about sex, mum?”

Jean Granger sighed inwardly, she had already had this talk with her daughter and that had been uncomfortable enough. “Well, you’ve already had sex with Sirius, dear.”

“I-I know.” Hermione blushed brightly. “What about now, though?”

“I think that you should let things take their natural course. You’ll be alone with him a lot and you already have an attraction to him.” She helped Hermione put her shirt on.

“I do?”

“Well, you fell in love with him once, didn’t you?” She helped Hermione into her shoes and then sat in the chair once again.

“Oh, right.” As nervous as the idea made her, her mother had a point. This had all already happened. Hermione shook her head to clear it.

“Are you ready?”

“I want to talk to you about Hogwarts, dear.” Her mother was uncertain how her daughter was going to take the next thing that she had to say.

“I know, I have to drop out.” Hermione had known this was coming.

“Well, Professor Dumbledore is here. We thought we could talk with him before Sirius took you home.”

“Really? He’s here?” Hermione wondered if he was here to see her.

“You’re Headmaster met with some sort of accident and is recovering in the next room.”

“Professor Dumbledore? What happened?”

“Something about a magical fire. We don’t have all the details, he’s doing much better now.”

“Well, that’s good.”

“Well, we’re going to talk with him and take care of that while we’re here.”

“Will they let me take the year over?”

“Sirius mentioned something about a library at your new home. He said you could study from home and maybe even be ready to take your NEWTs at the end of the year.”

Hermione sighed, that was good news. It would give her something to fill her days with. Her mother left her on the bed and fetched Sirius. He helped her off the bed and with a firm arm around her waist he helped her to walk out of the room.

Hermione felt his warm body next to hers and realized there was something very familiar about it. His spicy masculine smell was

comforting, the rumbling in his chest when he spoke was soothing. She knew this, she knew she did.

The four of them walked out into the hallway where she saw Ron, Harry, Remus, Tonks, Molly Weasley and Andromeda. She was rushed by the group but a dark look from Sirius had them keeping their distance. He told them all there would be plenty of time for this once they got her home. Molly told him they would wait for them at Sirius and Hermione's.

"Let me at least say hello, Sirius." Andromeda stood her ground. "I have to be leaving for home."

Sirius grunted his assent and let Andromeda hug his wife. She told Hermione how happy she was to see her up and around. With a parting dark look at Sirius, Andromeda left for home.

Harry, Ron and Tonks let themselves be herded away by Molly Weasley. Only Remus stayed behind as moral support for Sirius.

They moved on to the room next to hers and stood in the doorway. Dumbledore waved them all in, he was looking well thought Sirius.

"It is good to see you, my dear!" The bright, intelligent eyes regarded Hermione with a good deal of relief. He had heard she was doing much better but actually seeing it was a wonderful thing.

"I only just heard. What happened to you?" Hermione looked at her Headmaster with concerned eyes.

"Well, that is a story for another day. Right now we need to talk about your education." Dumbledore gave Sirius a significant look.

"I think that it's best if I dropped out, I have a long road of recovery ahead of me." This was the worst part of all for Hermione. Her education was extremely important to her.

"I must agree with you. I am sorry, you have always been one of my best students. I understand from Sirius that you are going to have a

well stocked library in your new home. If I know you as well as I think I do you will be more than ready to take your NEWTs.” Dumbledore knew that this was a compromise that she could live with.

“That’s what mum told me as well.” She felt Sirius give her body a little squeeze.

“Well, then its settled. You may visit the school whenever you wish. I know Harry and Ron are most anxious to see you well.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“We’ll see you later, then?”

She smiled and nodded and then let Sirius take her home.

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o0o0o0o0o0o0o0o0o0o0o0o0o0o0o0o0o0A/N: Thank you for the reviews!

Oh, boy. I seem to be in a lot of trouble.

Come on...did you really want hearts and flowers and pink, fluffy kitty cats? Where's the fun in that? What's life without a little challenge?

Besides...I really, really enjoy torturing Sirius. It's an issue, I know.

I PROMISE to give him plenty of opportunity to try and win her heart, again.

Forgive me?

Please review!

Adjust

NC17

The house at twenty four, Eternal Springs was bustling with people. Hermione was glad that there were people all around her. Once they were gone it would just be herself and her husband. Her husband.

The word sounded weird in her head, like something from a different language. She wanted to say it out loud, later maybe, when she was alone with her thoughts. She wasn't quite ready to be alone with her thoughts though, not just yet.

Hermione looked around at the house that she shared with Sirius and realized, décor aside, that she liked it. It was just the right size and had a pleasant personality of its own. It wasn't the failing, decrepit mansion at number twelve, Grimmauld Place. She was actually quite pleased that they didn't live at the over sized manor.

She learned the whole story of what happened here on Christmas Day from Harry and Ron. After Christmas dinner everyone had snuck over to number twenty four, Eternal Springs while Sirius distracted her. He gave her the address where she was to receive her Christmas present from him. She arrived to find everyone had come over when she wasn't looking. Then he had come up behind her, wrapped his arms around and introduced her to their new home.

Hermione blushed when they told her that she had spun in his arms and kissed him. She, kissing Sirius Black, it was hard for her to imagine.

The rest of the story was less of a happy, romantic fairy tale. It made her very sad to think that just when she had it all, the man, the house, the ring, it was all snatched away.

And now...well, now there were quite a few things she had to adjust to.

No one seemed to think it was odd in the least that Sirius was physically demonstrative with her. No one was shocked when he lay

a tender kiss on her temple or tucked her hair behind her ear. There was a tone of voice he used for her and her alone. And then there was the way that he looked at her. And all these things produced a reaction in her that she was completely unfamiliar with and yet he was familiar. His behavior towards her was familiar and yet also surprising and strange.

The memories she was left with didn't prepare her for this new reality.

She looked around at her house and wished she could walk about unaided. She wanted to explore, to see, to acclimate. Instead she was confined to the couch and waited for the world to come to her.

Molly Weasley conjured a tray with legs and put a plate of food in front of her and then returned to the kitchen where she was visiting with Hermione's mother. Her father was speaking with Sirius out on the back porch, he was smoking a cigarette and laughing. Her father was no doubt preaching the ills of said act. Harry, Ron, Tonks and Remus were playing with Sirius' stereo system.

Hermione sat alone and contemplated her plate of food. She was hungry, very hungry but she was struggling with the fork. She couldn't get her fingers to grip it properly and she was getting frustrated. She didn't want to ask for help, didn't want to be dependant on others and she certainly didn't want to be fed. She finally gave up, forcing the tears of frustration away. She wouldn't cry, not over this.

"Aren't you hungry dear?" Her mother had been watching Hermione struggle, not sure what to do. She knew her daughter wouldn't appreciate being coddled. She decided to let Hermione come to her.

"Not really, no." Just then Hermione's stomach grumbled so loudly it made Harry and Ron turn to look at her.

"You are too, what's the matter? Why won't you eat?" Harry was slow to catch on, it wasn't that she wouldn't eat, it was that she couldn't.

The tears that she had kept in submission finally spilled out of her eyes. Her face was red with frustration and anger at her situation. She cast a dark look at the man standing out on the back porch with her father and realized that this was his fault.

Her mother read her daughter accurately, she sat down beside Hermione and gave her a sympathetic smile. "He didn't mean for any of this to happen, dear."

Hermione sniffed loudly and wiped her eyes. "I know," she whispered. Hermione realized that in order to survive she was going to have to swallow some of her pride. "Do you mind? I can't seem to hold the fork."

"Not at all, dear. You know, no one is going to think less of you for having a little trouble doing for yourself." She lifted the fork to her daughters mouth who took the food with a grateful smile.

Hermione nodded in response to her mother as she chewed. The healers had told her that with practice she would get better. She would have to try using her utensils when she wasn't eating, when she wasn't quite as hungry.

Sirius and Herman Granger returned from outside, Sirius looked at Hermione and winced. He knew his independent witch hated every minute of this. He went into the kitchen and got a plate of food and sat down in the family room. Everyone took his cue and followed suit. Instead of eating in the dining room they joined her in the family room like it was the most natural thing in the world.

They all complimented the two mothers on a wonderful meal and made small talk. It wasn't long before Hermione felt more at ease and she wondered at his ability to do that, to make her handicap seem like nothing.

After dinner was over Mrs. Weasley set the kitchen to work while the Grangers spoke to Hermione and Sirius before they left for home. Jean Granger was anxious for Hermione, about what their first night together would be like. Hermione had a lot to try and overcome in a very short amount of time. She hugged her daughter tightly.

“We’ll be over tomorrow to check on you.” She kissed her Hermione on the cheek.

“Thanks, mum...for everything.” Hermione smiled at her mother.

Her father leaned down and gave her a peck on the cheek. “We’ll see you tomorrow, Pumpkin.”

Hermione nodded and smiled at her father as he turned to Sirius. The two men shook hands and then Sirius walked the Grangers to the front door.

“Herman, Jean...we’ll see you tomorrow, then?” The Grangers said their good bye to Sirius and he closed the door after them.

Sirius walked back into the family room and sat down beside Hermione, he rested his hand on her leg and started talking to Molly. He felt Hermione stiffen slightly beside him and chose to ignore it. He had been reading the little reactions she had to him and let that be his guide. He wasn’t going to push her but he also wasn’t going to act as though they were merely friends. The sooner she was comfortable with him, the easier this would be.

“There are leftovers for the two of you and tomorrow I’ll bring over some more food.” Molly Weasley knew that in the beginning Sirius was going to have a time of it. Not having to worry about food would be a great help to him.

“Thank you, Molly. We really appreciate it.”

“Well then, I think I’ll be running along. Arthur’s going to need his dinner.” Molly Weasley gave Hermione a hug and patted Sirius on the back.

“I don’t need to tell you two to behave. You’re a guest in this house and Sirius doesn’t need a pair of unruly teenagers underfoot.” Molly was speaking to Harry and Ron who were spending the weekend with Hermione and Sirius.

“Mum!” Ron hated it when his mother spoke to him like he was a child.

“We will, Mrs .Weasley.” Harry smiled at Molly and turned back to the cassettes in front of him.

Molly said good bye to Remus and Tonks and then left for home by floo.

Hermione yawned impressively and leaned unconsciously into Sirius. It surprised her to have done so but once she was there she found him very comfortable. Sirius smiled and draped an arm around her, pulling her close. She rested her head on his shoulders as her eyes began to droop.

“That’s our cue,” said Remus, smiling at Hermione. Even though she couldn’t remember it, it seemed that something of her feelings for Sirius were still there. It gave him hope for the couple and made him wonder about the mystery that was love.

Hermione stirred and blushed at her actions, she didn’t realize she was being watched. Remus bent down and gave her a peck on the cheek and a knowing smile. Tonks gave Hermione a fierce hug and then Sirius as well.

“I can’t make it over tomorrow, I’m on duty. I’ll pop in just as soon as I can.” Tonks bumped into a table, nearly knocking it over as she made her way over to the fireplace.

“When do you want to get started on that library?” Remus walked over to the fireplace and put an arm around Tonks’ waist.

“Oh, well...let’s get Hermione settled in first. What about next week?” Sirius was glad that Remus was going to help. His friend had a much greater knowledge of books than he did and would be asset in getting set up.

“Sounds like a plan. We’ll drop by in a few days, see how it’s going.” Remus patted his friend on the back and then left by floo after his girlfriend.

Sirius sat back down beside Hermione and pulled her into him, refusing to lose any ground with her.

“You seem pretty tired. Are you ready for bed?” He let his fingers dance along her arm and smiled when he felt her shiver.

Hermione was blushing scarlet, she glanced at Harry and Ron to see if they had been listening in. They seemed completely oblivious to the couple as they were engrossed in listening to music. Ron was completely fascinated by the stereo system. She glanced back at Sirius and nodded.

“Oh, almost forgot.” Sirius walked to kitchen and came back with her anti seizure potion. He measured out the right dosage and tipped it into her mouth. He returned the potion to its place in the kitchen.

Sirius paused in front of the boys. “We’re off to bed. Why don’t you two do something a little quieter. There is a chess set over in the corner.” Harry and Ron looked up at Sirius and nodded. “Don’t stay up too late, boys.”

Harry noticed Hermione blushing, he knew it was only a matter of time before Ginny filled her in on a few details. He wondered privately if she would hex Sirius when she found out how they christened nearly every room at number twelve, Grimmauld Place. His eyes opened wide with surprise, it had just occurred to him, she didn’t know about the blaze.

Sirius returned to Hermione and helped her into a standing position. He was never happier that he had chosen a house with a master bedroom on the first floor. They ambled past the boys and then Sirius shut the door behind them.

He deposited her gently on the bed and then sat down beside her.

“I know this is going to be a bit awkward for you at first and it probably doesn’t help knowing that I’ve seen you naked before.” His voice was gentle and soothing, he was trying to make this as easy as possible for her.

“No, not really.” Her voice was quiet and unsure, she hoped he knew what to do because she was at a loss.

“I imagine you’d like to have a bath, you were in that hospital bed for a week.” He pushed her hair off of her neck, exposing the skin there. He felt a great rush to his loins when he thought that only a few weeks ago he would have kissed that skin.

She looked at him gratefully, she didn’t want to have to ask for that. She was oily and grimy and didn’t want to get into bed feeling like that. “You don’t mind?”

“Of course not, don’t be silly.” Sirius stood up and went into the adjoining bathroom and poured her a bath. She could hear him humming from within as the sound reverberated off the walls.

Sirius returned to her and took a deep breath, this was going to be the hard part, for both of them.

“Alright, baby. Lets get these clothes off of you.”

He watched as her face and neck flushed and remembered their first night together, she was going to be just as shy as she was then. She was the girl from that night, not the woman she turned into under his care.

Hermione trembled and flushed, she felt hot under his sympathetic gaze. He seemed to grasp that this was difficult for her, for which she was grateful. Still, it didn’t make it any easier.

Sirius unbuttoned her shirt slowly, not wanting to make the experience any more difficult for her. At least that’s what he told himself, he was loath to see her naked when there was nothing he could do with her. He had to control the impulse to kiss her as he

undressed her. He pushed her shirt off of her shoulders and moved down to her shoes which he slipped off. She lay back on the bed so he could take off her pants, he felt his fingers tremble. He unbuttoned and unzipped them and then pulled them slowly off of her body.

God she was perfect.

He was being punished, this was his punishment. Wanting her with every fiber of his being and not being able to kiss or caress her. He slipped her knickers off and swallowed the dry knot in his throat. He pulled her back into a sitting position and unlatched her bra.

Will someone please just Avada me?

Hermione had never been naked in front of a man, at least not that she could remember. Sirius had gone strangely quiet as he undressed her. So far he had kept up a steady stream of chatter to distract her from what she couldn't do for herself. She was wishing for that chatter now but it was not forthcoming. She had to live in this embarrassing moment, experiencing every second of it.

Sirius pulled her to her feet and wrapped a shaky arm around her naked waist. He walked her into the bathroom, lifted her up and then set down gently in the warm water.

There were a variety of soaps and sponges, everything she would need to bathe. Sirius knelt down beside the tub and helped her. He washed and rinsed her hair and scrubbed every inch of her body and he did it all in silence. When he was done and was drying her off she thanked him.

"Oh, certainly. It was nothing." His voice was strangely husky and low. When she finally chanced a look at his face she noticed that his eyes were a good bit darker than usual. He glanced at her face, the look in his eyes made her feel rather warm and tingly.

He walked her back to their bed and helped her dressed. She noticed that he had clothes on her a lot faster than he had them off of her.

Sirius pulled back the covers for her and then tucked her in. He told her he would along in a minute, that he had to take a shower himself. Despite herself she found that she was rather curious about what he would look like naked but was disappointed when he walked into the bathroom fully clothed. She heard the water running and felt just a little bit huffy. It was fine for him to see her naked but not the other way around.

Sirius stood under the cold water and let the tension slowly ease out of him. This was going to drive him mad, he just knew it. His witch, his beautiful, young, sexy witch and he could have none of it. The worst part was that he could smell her, he knew what was going on with her body even if she didn't. He wondered just how tense things would have to become before she realized what to do about it. He thought about her that first night and realized it could take quite some time.

He was in the shower a good thirty minutes before he emerged. He dried off and then realized his bed clothes were in the other room. No matter, he was under control. She would just have to get used to seeing him nude. He walked into the bedroom to find her asleep. He found himself a pair of boxer shorts and slipped into bed beside her.

The bed was rather large giving her a small amount of privacy on the far side from him.

Sirius rested on his side as he watched her fall asleep. He couldn't help but think miserably about all that he had lost. When he was certain she had fallen asleep he leaned into her and lay a chaste kiss on her cheek.

"I love you, Hermione."

0o0o0o0o0o0o0o0o0o0

Sirius was awoken by the jerky, flailing arms of Hermione in mid seizure. He jumped out of bed and ran around to her side. He threw the covers off of her and pulled her into a sitting position. As she slowly woke up the jerking began to subside. It was only in the

relaxed state of sleep that she was in danger. The seizures were caused by the barrier Snape had erected in her brain. For whatever reason waking her and getting her to walk around was supposed to help. Hermione let Sirius pull her to her feet and walk her around. Only when he was certain that she was fully awake did he run to the kitchen for her potion.

Hermione had little to say, she was very angry that this was happening to her. She knew that the seizures were going to go away but until they did it would be hard to live with. She wanted to scream and cry and rage at Sirius but she just couldn't see what that would help.

Sirius walked back into the bedroom and saw the unmistakable signs of anger in his witch. He braced himself for her to hex him. He had been ready for that for the last twenty four hours. He stood in the doorway and watched as she got control of herself. He knew he was going to have to give her an outlet for that at some point. Summoning his courage he walked back over to her and sat down beside her.

"I'm sorry, baby."

"I'm really, really angry at you for this." Her voice was shaking.

"I know."

"How could you not check the ring for curses, Sirius? You're smarter than that."

"I wanted it too much." As he said the words the truth of it hit him. He had wanted to give her something of himself, of his family. He had ignored the possibility of a threat because he wanted to fly in the face of family tradition. He never slowed down long enough to check for danger.

"I lost so much." Hermione began to sob, she let him envelop her in his arms. As angry as she was with him she couldn't help the feeling that this was where her comfort lay, with him. She pulled back and looked at him. "You lost as well, didn't you?"

Sirius had to look away, he couldn't face her eyes, her accusation or her truth. He was never going to get back what he had with her. The only possibility for hope lay in moving forward, together.

"I'm tired. Let's go back to sleep." She let him help her back into the bed, he covered her and then put himself to bed.

0o0o0o0o0o0o0o0o0o0

Sirius woke the next morning to find that he had gone to hell. Just as it had every morning, his cock stood at attention and there was a previously willing witch in bed beside him. The aforementioned witch had entwined her body with his in her sleep, her leg brushed up against his cock. Sirius groaned in frustration.

He used to wake her with kisses and caresses before sliding himself into her tight heat. His cock twitched as thought about it. There would be none of that this morning. He lay quietly beside her in complete agony, her soft breath fluttered against his shoulder, her arm was clutching his chest.

Sirius slowly extricated himself and made his way back to the shower. Hermione stirred slowly and looked around her. She heard the noise from the bathroom. She was surprised that Sirius was in the shower again and decided he must really like to be clean. She noticed that she was on his side of the bed and wondered how she got there.

She moved back over to her side of the bed and hoped he wouldn't mention it. She must have woken up beside him in the bed and blushed at the thought. She realized then that she was still a bit tired and let her eyes close.

She stirred when she heard Sirius humming in the bathroom. She opened her eyes in time to see a very naked Sirius Black walking back into their bedroom.

Oh, my!

Hermione ducked under the covers a bit and let out a little gasp that she hoped he didn't hear. He did and looked over at her with a cheeky grin. He was completely comfortable with his nudity; that much was apparent. As much as she would like to turn her eyes away she found that she just couldn't. He was quite something to look at. She continued to peek at him from just under the covers.

"Good morning!" The smug self confidence was something he just couldn't get out of his voice. He knew it was just a matter of time before she submitted to him. Until then they were both going to be suffering.

"Good morning." Her voice was a little raspy. She watched him dress; she just couldn't tear her eyes away.

"See something you like?" Her eyes were wide like saucers. He just had to tease her, he couldn't help himself. He was pretty sure it would make her mad and flustered but he was willing to risk it.

Hermione slid under the covers, pulling them over her head. She muttered something he couldn't hear.

He decided he should probably rescue her from her embarrassment, it was enough to know she found him attractive. He walked over to her side of the bed and sat down. He pulled the covers off of her head and smiled.

"How are you feeling this morning? Last night was a bit scary." He saw the relief flood her face, he was going to drop it and move on.

"Much better. I'm really glad you were there."

"Me too." He leaned into her and kissed her on the temple. "Hungry? I can make us some breakfast."

"That would be nice."

She let him help her out of bed and into the family room. With his help she curled up on one of the couches. She watched him make

breakfast and pondered this whole being married to Sirius, thing. He was a handful, always trying to push her boundaries. She liked her boundaries and was comfortable with where she had them erected. They had already been pushed past her comfort zone. She had the feeling he was going to try and erode them and she was not comfortable with that.

The smell of breakfast being cooked drew the boys downstairs, they entered the family room looking zombies.

“How late did you two stay up.” There was a distinct laugh in Sirius’ voice.

Harry and Ron each muttered something different yet equally incoherent.

“Hmmm...very late.” Sirius looked over at the boys and Hermione and smiled. He was glad that they were here. He couldn’t be everything for her and knew she was going to need to see her friends as often as he could arrange it. “Why don’t you tell her about the final battle. I don’t think she knows a thing.”

“The final battle? You mean the war with Voldemort is over?” Hermione’s eyebrows had all but disappeared.

“Thanks to you!” Harry was beaming with pride at his friend.

Harry and Ron told her all about the golems and how Voldemort didn’t know which was the real Harry. They told her about her own golem saving her life and how Sirius had attacked Bellatrix in defense of her. Harry filled her in about his square off with Voldemort. Ron told her how she and Sirius rushed to Harry’s side afterward.

“I-I’ve read about golems but I’ve never made one.”

“We figured that one out together, baby.” Harry and Ron cringed at the endearment and Hermione turned scarlet.

“Really?”

“I promise to tell you all about it.” She understood that to mean it was a story for another time and she wondered what could be so secretive about that.

He wanted to tell her how they fell in love without the boys around. Someday he would tell Harry about his trip to Mexico with Hermione but now just wasn't the right time.

Harry took his godfather's cue and continued with the story of the last battle. He told her how the ministry workers interrogated her and tried to take her to Azkaban.

Before he could stop them Harry and Ron told her how they hadn't gotten to see her for a few days after that. They weren't privy to the information that Sirius had her locked in his bedroom for half a week. They were still a little irritated that they hadn't gotten to see her afterward.

“Where was I Sirius?” He shot the boys a deathly glare. He sat down beside Hermione and helped her eat her breakfast. He didn't do it like her mother had. Instead he made her hold the fork, he just increased her grip. He knew she needed to do for herself as much as possible.

“Harry, Ron, grab some breakfast. Eat at the dining room table if you don't mind.” He would tell her where she had been but not with their prying ears. He didn't speak until they were sat at the table and eating.

“You were with me.” She immediately felt the tension between them.

“Oh.” She didn't quite understand.

“You almost died, right in front of me. I couldn't bear to be parted from you.”

“Yes, but what did we do for three days.” She was still a bit puzzled.

“What do you think we did, Hermione?” He wanted so much to kiss her, to scoop her up and take her to the bedroom for another three days, or three weeks, or three months.

Ohhhhh

“Three days?” Hermione was feeling very, very warm.

“Well don’t blame me if you’re insatiable.” He let the tension break with a bit of light teasing. He snuck a glance and had to chuckle at how red she had gone. “Come on, lets finish your breakfast.”

Hermione was rather quiet for the rest of her breakfast. She let Sirius do all the talking and so he filled the room with his friendly chatter. She just didn’t know what to think of all of this. She would be lying if she said she weren’t the tiniest bit curious. She was very curious about a single activity that could keep her willingly hidden away for three days.

Sirius took her plate with him and went to fix his own. He wasn’t going to hold back about who they had been, not with her, not when he wanted so much to be back there. The boys joined her in the family room after they had finished their breakfast. Eventually they all got dressed and prepared for the day.

Their afternoon was filled with the comings and goings of family and friends. Molly Weasley brought food and her parents visited with her for a number of hours.

As the afternoon wore on the house slowly emptied of its guests. First her parents left and then a few hours later Molly took Harry and Ron back to Hogwarts.

Hermione looked about her house and realized she was all alone with her husband.

Oh, yes. This was going to take some getting used to.

[illegible]

A/N: Thank you for the reviews!

Glad to see some of you are not so mad at me anymore!

I feel like I ducked a curse!

Us

Hermione and Sirius fell into a daily pattern that made the uncomfortable moments more bearable. Fortunately as the week progressed she was able to do more and more for herself. The seizures and migraines weren't under any better control than before but her motor skills improved drastically. She would actually wear herself out practicing. On more than one occasion she had fallen and Sirius had to insist that she take a break.

The results of her efforts were that she could walk slowly around by herself and dress and undress herself. She still needed help getting into and out of the tub. When she ate, she made a mess but she did it on her own.

Sirius couldn't help but admire her tenacity.

She disliked being out of control of her own life and did whatever it took to remedy that. It wasn't easy but she felt like she was gaining ground every day.

Sirius was overly anxious in his affections towards her, it wasn't like him but this situation had him off balance. In the past week she had found a variety of gifts from him that he had just left lying about. Flowers. Chocolates. Jewelry from a muggle store, whose name she recognized on the box. He was trying so hard. Too hard.

She was struggling with him as well. She couldn't deny that she had some sort of feeling for him. She found that she liked being around him, a lot. She kept finding reasons to keep him in her company. His presence was soothing and comforting to her. She couldn't explain to herself why she felt the way she did and that's what bothered her.

What was far more disturbing was the intense physical reaction she had to him. She had no frame of reference for the rush of desire she felt for him or the heat which pooled between her legs.

She may have lost her memories but what she was left with shocked her.

And that wasn't all...

She liked the way he smelled.

The day she realized that little horror she buried her head in a book and refused to look at him for the rest of the afternoon.

The problem with all of this was that it didn't fit the mold. She and Sirius were known for having a go at each other. Her last actual memory of him involved a magnificent row over Kreacher. It happened the day before she, Harry and Ron were to leave on the Hogwarts Express for their sixth year. Molly Weasley intervened, telling them both off and Hermione had left the drawing room fuming.

The next day things were still quite tense between them. They had made their apologies as usual but they hadn't quite cooled off. That last argument over Kreacher had her wondering whether or not she should even go to number twelve, Grimmauld Place the next summer.

And now she was married to him, happily by all accounts.

It just didn't make sense.

She decided she needed to hear it from the horse himself.

She waited until he surfaced from the basement where he was working on her library with Remus. He had come up to grab them both a beer before returning to work.

He was shirtless and sweaty. Hermione bit her lip and looked away while she composed herself. She had never had such strong reactions to a boy before much less a man like Sirius. This was becoming a regular occurrence with her and she found it extremely annoying.

She cleared her throat to get his attention, he looked over at her and flashed a very sexy smile.

“Did you need me?”

“Can we talk, Sirius?”

“Uh, sure. Just let me take this beer to Remus.” Sirius left for the basement and returned about five minutes later.

“So, what’s on your mind?” He took a seat on the couch next to her.

“Would you tell me about us?”

For some reason he didn’t expect this question quite so soon.

“Sure, uh...where to start...”

“Tell me how we fell in love. No, wait...I mean I want to know about that, all about that.” She glanced shyly at him. “First, I want to talk about...well, about...about that thing that we did.” Her voice dropped to just above a whisper on the last bit.

“You mean our love making?” He didn’t whisper. Hermione’s face turned a vibrant shade of red.

“Um...do you expect me to ah...well, I mean do I have to...”

“No, of course not. Although I expect that when you’re ready you’ll want to.” That suggestion was just enough to make her feel warm and slightly tense.

“How will I know...”

Sirius cut her off, he leaned in close, his lips almost touching hers. “Trust me, you’ll know.” His voice was low, his warm breath mingled with hers. For one brief moment she wished he would make good on the kiss his lips were promising.

He pulled back with a smirk on his face. He was in agony, why shouldn’t she be in agony right along with him?

When she spoke next it started out with a squeak, she coughed to clear her throat, attempting to maintain some semblance of composure. "So...how did we fall in love? We were married first but that was just in name, so that I was safe from the ministry, right?"

"Well, not exactly. The law required that we consummate the marriage. That ring on your finger used to have a charm on it which let the ministry know if we were making love or not." Hermione made an indignant spluttering sound.

"You must be joking."

"Nope...it was pretty difficult, for both of us."

"How did we get through that?" Hermione whispered her alarm, looking horrified.

"We just did. I mean the first night with you was pretty awkward but we worked it out." He curled a tendril of her hair around his finger.

"How?" Part of her couldn't imagine having sex with him. The other part knew it had already happened and it fed a growing curiosity in her.

"It just did. I came over on Friday evenings and stayed in your private quarters..."

"My private quarters?" Hermione looked puzzled.

"You made Head Girl, didn't you know?" Judging from the squeal she did not know about that detail.

"So...when did things change between us?" She suddenly felt rather shy, his proximity, the subject matter, it all added to her slight discomfort. So did her emotional and physical responses to him. She longed to reach out and touch him. She shifted her body back from his, needing her space.

Sirius was not fooled. He could smell the changes in her body chemistry, he had been sensing her reaction to him all week and it was making him a little crazy. He wanted to push his advantage with her.

Unfortunately Remus was downstairs, he would have to cut this conversation short.

“I want to tell you all about this, I do. But this requires a longer conversation and I’ve got Remus downstairs helping me with your library. I promise as soon as we’re done for the day I’ll send Remus on his way and we’ll talk.” He pressed his lips to her temple. “I love you and I want you to know how that happened.” He gave her one last smile before returning to the basement.

Sirius paused on the stairs leading to the basement, muttering darkly to himself about the wisdom of choosing to become a dog.

Remus looked up as he heard Sirius stomp down the stairs. Sirius went back to work in relative quiet. He knew Sirius well enough to know that something must have just happened. He had left with a smile and returned with a frown. Remus raised an eyebrow at his friend but said nothing.

“I can’t believe it’s all gone.” There was a gruffness to Sirius’ voice. “I feel like I’m being punished but I just don’t know what for.”

“What’s all gone.”

“You know what!” Sirius spoke a little more harshly than he intended to.

Remus decided to just be quiet. He’d been aware of the sadness and frustration from Sirius all day. His friend was trying to grieve but wasn’t sure how. Hermione wasn’t dead but their love surely seemed to be although Remus wasn’t entirely sold on that point.

“I miss her, Remus.”

“I know.”

“Do you remember, several months ago when I told you about a very uncomfortable conversation between Hermione and myself?” Sirius was glad of the physical labor, it helped him to work off some of his frustration.

“Yes, I seem to recall that.”

“Well, the girl from that conversation is the same girl that is right upstairs and I just don’t know how to...I don’t want to push her but at the same time I am going mad with wanting her.” Sirius angrily shoved a bookcase into place.

“Why don’t you want to push her?” Remus felt that it was an honest question and something that ought to be considered.

“What? You mean throw caution to the wind and...”

“No! No! No!” Remus gave his friend a pained expression. “Just nudge her boundaries a bit. Maybe she just needs a little shove in the right direction.” Remus knew she didn’t need much of a shove, the house positively reeked of her arousal.

“Nudge her boundaries? Oh, right...I suppose I’m already doing that. Not on purpose, though...not really.” Sirius realized he was lying. “Ok, maybe I am.”

“You were happy once. Who’s to say you couldn’t be happy again?” Remus was sad for his friend. If anyone deserved happiness it was Sirius.

“You think?”

“I think you ought to try and find out. Not just for you either, she was happy too.” Remus wiped the sweat off his brow. “I’m beat. Call it a day?”

“Yeah. You want to stay for dinner?” Sirius felt a little better after his purge and physical labor.

“Dora’s waiting on me.” Remus followed Sirius up the stairs.

“Tell my cousin hello.”

“Certainly.”

Remus walked over to Hermione and said his good bye to her. He and Sirius discussed picking back up the next day as they walked to the front door. Sirius closed it behind him and turned to Hermione.

“Hungry?”

“Oh, yes a bit.”

“Let me hop in the shower and then we’ll eat some of that casserole Molly left us yesterday.” Hermione watched him as he disappeared into their bedroom. She was startled when she heard a noise from the fireplace.

Molly Weasley stepped through, flicked her wand and conjured Hermione’s things from Hogwarts.

“Hello, Mrs. Weasley.”

“Hello, dear. Well, here you are. I’ve packed all your things up in your trunk. So, tell me...how are you feeling?” Molly sat down on the couch beside her.

“Better, see...” She got up and walked around for Molly. “I’m doing more and more for myself. Sirius has been such a help.”

“And how’s that going?” Molly was secretly pleased that Sirius was out of ear shot.

“I’m getting used to him. He’s not so bad. Not at all how I remember him.” It was nice to be able to share with the older woman. “He’s got some odd hang ups though.”

“Oh?” Molly could tick a few of his hang ups on all her fingers.

“I mean I think it’s an odd hang up. I’ve never seen someone shower as often as he does. Not even Lavender Brown and she was always in the shower, washing her hair.” Hermione had an inkling, just the barest suspicion that it might be about her.

‘Poor, Sirius,’ thought Molly. That had to be rough on him. They had been so spirited before she was cursed. Molly Weasley smiled at Hermione. “You know, you and Sirius were quite close. I imagine he is missing you very much.”

“Well, no. Why would he be. I’m mean, we’re here together all the time.” Hermione didn’t know what Mrs. Weasley was getting at.

“No, I mean the two of you were...” How to say this. “The two of you used to frolic about quite a bit.”

“Frolic? Oh...how do you know that?” Hermione asked the question before she thought about what the answer might be.

“Oh, only the number of times I caught the two of you red handed.” She smiled at Hermione’s sharp intake of breath.

“You did not!”

“Oh, yes I did!” Molly frowned as she recounted the details. “There was the kitchen table...”

“No!”

“And then there was the library...”

Hermione felt faint.

“And of course my very favorite...the hallway just inside the front door where Harry and Ron caught quite a show.”

“I don’t want to know anymore.” Hermione’s voice was just a whisper. She could have lived a long full life without that knowledge.

“It’s alright you know, to want that with him. You’re his wife and the two of you were quite fond of each other.” Molly had spoken with her mother, they both believed that it was in Hermione’s best interest to embrace the marriage. Their reasoning was that it had happened once before, surely it could happen again. She was going to need him during her recovery and a happy marriage would make that a lot easier.

“I don’t know what I want with him.”

“I know this must all be very confusing for you. Let him guide you through this, he did it once before.” Molly looked up as Sirius returned from his shower.

“Alright, baby. How about that din...oh, hello Molly.” Sirius was surprised to see they had a guest.

“Hello, Sirius. I was just bringing Hermione her things from Hogwarts.” Molly stood to leave. She cupped her hand around Hermione’s face. “Remember what we talked about.”

Hermione nodded, more than a little stunned at the conversation she had just had.

“I’ll just be off. Can’t really stay for a long visit.” She patted Sirius on the shoulder and left through the fireplace.

Sirius wondered what they spoke of, she was very quiet and seemed sort of dazed. He let her mull over whatever Molly had said while he fixed them each a plate of dinner. He brought it to her and sat down beside her. They ate their dinner quietly, he cleaned up afterwards

and returned to her. They curled up on the couch together which was something they were in the habit of doing in the evening.

“I need to know, Sirius.”

“Need to know what, baby?” She felt his warm breath tickle her neck.

“About us.” There was that feeling again, he was close to her and it warmed her whole body.

“I want you to know everything.” She rested her head against his chest and waited for him to begin.

“The first few weeks, after that first night of course, were mostly about fun.” She turned to him in surprise.

“Fun?”

“That’s what love making is, sweetheart.” He decided to clarify what he meant, he had to do this once before. It might be easier to have some of this out of the way. “It’s fun, it feels good, it can be a rather intense experience but in a good way. There are times you want it so badly you can’t think straight.” Hermione turned her head away, she had some familiarity with not thinking straight as of late. He paused for questions but when there were none he continued.

“Then, due to circumstances surrounding the marriage law you came and stayed with me at headquarters. We spent several days together and I think that’s when the spark between us started.” Hermione nodded but remained quiet.

“Then I moved in with you at Hogwarts...” She interrupted him.

“Moved in?” He was stroking his fingers up and down her arm, she was having to fight to think clearly.

There was something in her tone of voice that told him her resistance was low.

“ Yeah, there was a threat against us from Lucius Malfoy. Dumbledore himself suggested it.” He shifted their bodies so he could snake his arm around her waist.

“What happened to Dumbledore?”

“That is another, also lengthy story. Let’s get though this one first. I promise to tell you all about it.” He wasn’t looking forward to that conversation. He knew he couldn’t put it off forever but he really wanted this talk to go unimpeded.

“So, we were around each other a lot at Hogwarts. You still had a lot to do with school and your Head Girl duties but we were together in the evenings and mornings.” His hand snuck under her shirt and stroked the skin on her sides. He realized he may have made a mistake but she just sighed without protest so he continued.

“Then we were attacked in Hogsmeade...” Hermione interrupted.

“Attacked? Hogsmeade?” She could hardly believe her ears.

“Well, you were having trouble with Lucius Malfoy’s son...”

He smiled when she said something that sound like ‘prat.’

“Indeed. Well, Draco was harassing you in the hallways, got caught and was expelled.” Hermione had to smile. “His father wasn’t pleased as you can imagine.” She shuddered when she thought about how ‘not pleased’ he must have been. “Then a couple of things happened at once that made the attack possible. First, there was an break out at Azkaban...” Hermione turned to look at him, Sirius nodded and continued. “Second, Voldemort took over at the ministry...” Hermione took her breath in sharply.

“Oh...we were in a lot of danger then, weren’t we?”

Sirius nodded. "We had to go on the run." In an act of bravery he lightly kissed a place on her neck that never failed to produce a reaction. He felt her tremble but she said nothing.

"Where did we go?" The part of her brain that protested his ministrations was drowned out by the bodily response that wanted him to keep going. Despite her better judgment she kept her mouth shut.

"Mexico."

"Why Mexico?" That seemed an awfully long way away. She was picturing saguaro cactus and desert sands.

"I'd been there before. After you and Harry rescued me." He kissed her again, wondering just how far he could push this.

"I thought you were in the tropics." She wore a little frown.

"I was in the tropics. You're thinking of the border with America. We were on the border with Guatemala." He moved his hand to the skin on her stomach, it tickled and made her giggle.

"Oh." The little voice in her head gave up. She was enjoying herself and didn't particularly want him to quit.

He turned her around so he could look at her when he spoke. "When we were in Mexico, it was all rather romantic. We would go on long walks along the beach that would end with love making on the sand." He noticed her flush and then glance at his lips. If he ever had a moment this was it.

"What are you feeling, Hermione?" He pressed his forehead against hers.

"Overwhelmed." She sighed, she was glad he asked because she would never have thought to express it out loud.

“You’re a little curious aren’t you?” He felt he just had to coax her out a bit.

Sirius leaned into her and let his lips flutter against hers. He wanted to guzzle but instead he sipped. He would unlock her all over again only he would let it happen at a pace she could manage, no matter how much it killed him to do so.

He smiled into the kiss when he felt her press back. He ran his hand in her hair and took control, pleased at how easily she submitted. He kissed her dryly but with passion. He was fighting a battle with himself to stay in control. He had pushed her pretty far and felt that for tonight, it was far enough. "I don't want to push you, baby. But I do miss you."

The minute his lips graced hers she knew this had happened before, a million times before. It was right and natural despite what her mind and memory was telling her. “Hmm.” It was just the softest little sound but it was music to his ears.

He pulled back to look at his witch's flushed face.

“That was...oh...”

“Yea?”

She looked into his eyes and wondered at the emotion that was threatening to burst through her chest. It welled up from deep inside and it had everything to do with Sirius.

“Tell me more about Mexico.” She let her head rest on his chest.

He pulled her in close, feeling the happiest he had in weeks. They curled up together on the couch for the rest of the night as he told her all about how he fell in love with her.

[illegible]

A/N: Thank you for the reviews!

Please review!

“I think it started when were spending more time around each other.

Crookshanks

NC17

Sirius was having the dream again, his favorite dream. His hands were roaming all over Hermione's body, his lips were locked on her neck and she was making the most wonderful sounds. Over her pajamas he pressed down on her clit with his thumb in a circular motion, his other hand was gently kneading a breast. The first couple of times he'd had the dream he had woken up startled, worried he was actually doing said act. She was always on her side of the bed safely asleep. He would get up and go to the bathroom and have himself a good wank.

Now he had the dream so often in the early morning that he just let himself enjoy it. It was particularly vivid this morning. Her body was responding so nicely to his attentions, she pressed herself into his thumb and arched her back and then she moaned. And it was loud.

Sirius' eyes flew open. His thumb was pressing a circular pattern on her clit, his hand was gently kneading her breast and his lips were locked on her neck. She was sound asleep and responding to him.

He was painfully hard.

He leapt shakily out of bed and ran for the bathroom. He was in such a rush he didn't make sure the bathroom door was closed. He just sort of shoved at it before he pulled out his cock.

Hermione was having the most delicious dream. She had never had a dream quite like this one. Her body was on fire but in a most marvelous way.

And then suddenly the dream and the splendid way it made her feel were over and gone. It was rather abrupt, it was enough to wake her. She yawned and rubbed her eyes, she stretched her body of all the sleepy kinks and sat up in bed.

She heard something coming from the bathroom, it sounded vaguely like Sirius. He was saying her name in a most peculiar way. He had

left the bathroom door open so she knew he couldn't be doing anything that required privacy.

She stood out of bed and walked over to the open door, she got a glimpse of him in the mirror and it stopped her in her tracks. She clamped her hand securely over her mouth to keep from making a sound. What she was witnessing held her transfixed.

Sirius had his cock out and he was pumping his hand up and down on it. His head was bowed and he was breathing heavily. Every so often he would call out Hermione's name. It was the first time she had ever seen a man's erect penis. His long, hard shaft sprung out of a bed of dark, thick curls. She watched fascinated as his hand ran up and over the head and then down again, over and over and over. She didn't want to be heard because if she were heard she wouldn't get to watch.

She realized that she wanted something from this, she wanted something to occur. The gently arousing feeling she woke up to was quickly escalating into something she didn't know how to handle. He kept saying her name and something in her wanted to scream out, 'I'm right here!' The whole experience was distressing and yet she refused to look away.

His hand moved faster over himself and he began to let out soft grunts. Each sound he made sent a surge of warmth to her core, each time he chanted her name it made her skin tingle. Her breaths came a little faster and her heart pounded.

Sirius' hand pumped ever faster and she noticed that his body was beginning to quiver slightly. She felt wetness begin to pool between her legs, her body felt poised for something. Something was about to happen, she wanted it to happen, needed it to happen.

Sirius came with a loud moan and he slumped against the wall. As he finished her body thrummed out a sympathetic pulse. The gentle sensation pulled a moan from her, Sirius glanced in her direction and caught her watching. Hermione took a step backward and tripped over her feet to the floor.

A cold wave of emotion washed over Sirius. He had carelessly allowed her to watch his shameful act. He quickly cleaned the mess he had just made, walked over to her and helped her up and onto the bed. Sirius watched for her reaction but his guilt wouldn't allow him to correctly read her emotion. He mistook the wide eyes and rapid breathing for fear, not arousal. The smell of her arousal was comingled with fear, fear was the only note he chose to acknowledge. He knelt on the floor in front of her, disgusted with himself.

"I'm sorry, Hermione. I never wanted you to see that." He hung his head and refused to meet her eyes.

Hermione's mind was working fast to try and process what had just happened or more to the point, what it had to do with her. He had been saying her name. In that moment she realized that what he had been doing to himself, he should have been doing with her.

She was his wife, here in the flesh and yet he was reduced to masturbating in the bathroom. She looked at her handsome husband, knelt before her in shame, apologizing to her.

"No...I don't want you to be sorry." She tucked her hand under his chin and lifted his head so that he could meet her eyes.

"But I..." She didn't let him finish his thought. They were going to have to deal with this.

"This is what you meant, when you said you missed me." The emotion he evoked in her and her physical response to him were residual of the love they had shared. The context she had been searching for was coming into sharper focus.

"Yes."

Hermione thought about what her mother said, what Mrs. Weasley said and then looked into his eyes. His eyes were filled with love mixed in with shame.

“I’m not ready for all of this...” He interrupted her with words quickly spoken.

“I know, I don’t expect...” She put a hand up to his mouth.

“But I can’t deny that I’m curious.” She paused to give him a moment to understand what she was saying. “I don’t know what to do with the way you make me feel.”

“How do I make you feel, Hermione?” He leaned his forehead against hers, his pulse quickening slightly.

“Like I’m on fire, like I need something but I don’t know what.”

That was all he needed. He leaned in and captured her lips, pouring all his passion and longing into the kiss. It felt like coming home. Their tongues danced out a slow rhythm as their arms gently found each other.

Their kiss felt so right to her, she had been missing this and didn’t even realize it. She let her hands roam into silky black hair and smiled at his small moan of pleasure. She pulled back and touched his face with her hand.

“I’m sorry you had to do that, I’m sorry that I’m not the wife that you knew.” She got a glimpse of what she had been missing and it made her sad for him. They had been so much more to each other.

“It’s not your fault.” He spoke quietly, this was of his own doing.

“We’re going to have to move past that.” He looked at her in surprise, he expected her to hate him forever for his mistake. She nodded her head to confirm her words. “I want to be your wife in every sense. You’re just going to need to let me ease into it.”

“I can be patient.” His voice grew husky as he thought about easing her into it.

She leaned forward and pressed her lips to his once again. He surprised her when he slid his lips away from her mouth and across her jaw. He smiled when she let out a little sigh as his lips nibbled and sucked at her neck and throat.

“How’s that fire now, baby?”

“Ohhhhh.”

He chuckled softly, her face was flush and her pupils were blown. He knew he was going to have to cut this short. She wanted to take it slow but probably didn’t know how to slow down.

“Don’t you have company coming today?” He pulled her attention away from him and back to their day.

“Oh, right. Ginny is spending the weekend with us.” Dumbledore had quietly given her closest friends permission to visit with her at home.

“Better get ready, then.” He stood up and helped her to her feet. He patted her bottom in the direction of the bathroom. She smiled at him from over her shoulder.

She no longer needed his help to get in and out of the bathtub so he left the bedroom to go make breakfast for the two of them.

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Hermione and Sirius were sat at the dining room table eating breakfast when Ginny came through the fireplace. Hermione smiled at her friend and then laughed happily when she saw who she had in her arms.

“Crookshanks!”

“We finally caught him!” Ginny handed the large, fluffy cat over to his owner. “We were a little worried he was lost at number twelve, Grimmauld Place but then Ron spotted him.”

Sirius looked up in alarm at Ginny, Hermione didn't know. He leveled an intense glare at Ginny and shook his head at her from behind Hermione's back. He planned on telling her but a good opportunity just hadn't presented itself.

"Ginny, why is he pink?" The normally ginger colored cat was a vibrant shade of pink. The cat looked wildly unhappy about it.

"I mastered the color change charm!" Ginny didn't seem to think there was anything wrong with the way the cat looked.

Hermione let the Crookshanks drop to the floor and hugged her friend tightly. She missed all her friends and was in desperate need of a little girl talk. There were a few things she needed to process and Ginny was always a help.

Sirius smiled softly at his wife and her friend. He was glad Dumbledore had made an exception for Hermione's friends. Last weekend they had been working on the library and she had spent a lot of time alone. Not that she seemed to mind so much. Remus had brought her a treasury of books on Dark Curse reversal.

"Oh, I almost forgot. Professor Dumbledore sent this with me for you." Ginny handed over a small stack of parchment from her duffle bag. "It's everything you'll need to study for your NEWTs."

"Oh, that reminds me. You have to come see what Sirius made for me." She looked over at her husband with a huge smile. She led Ginny down into the basement, showing off just how much progress she had made by being able to navigate the steps on her own.

The walls were lined in bookshelves and the bookshelves were filled with books. Sirius had taken her to Diagon Alley for a short trip and let her pick out anything she wanted. Once they were delivered he and Remus had put the books away.

In the middle of the room were couches, chairs and tables and in one corner was a desk for writing. Ginny looked around in wonder, for the

first time she appreciated just how rich Hermione's husband had to be to be able to afford all of this.

"Look at this Ginny." Hermione walked up to one of the bookshelves and pressed a button. The bookshelves slid to the side to reveal two more bookshelves behind them. Hermione stepped in and pressed another knob to reveal two more bookshelves. "Its like that all the way around!"

"Bottomless Bookshelves?" Ginny was flabbergasted, that was incredibly pricey.

"Yes! Isn't it wonderful!" Hermione clapped her hands with glee. "I'm going to ask Sirius if we can bring over some of the books from the library at number twelve, Grimmauld Place." She noticed when Ginny looked away sharply.

"You think that's too much? I shouldn't ask for that?" Hermione hadn't thought that would be rude but maybe she was wrong.

"No...uh...I don't know. You should probably talk with Sirius about headquarters." Ginny was sure Sirius would kill her for saying that but what was she supposed to do. She wouldn't lie to Hermione.

"Why? Did something happen?" Hermione stepped out of the bookshelves and put them back into place.

"He's going to kill me if I tell you." Hermione looked at Ginny puzzled.

"Ginny what happened there?" Hermione sat on one of the couches and patted the seat next to her.

Ginny sighed and sat down beside her and thought about where to start. She'd heard all about it from Harry.

"Ok...the healers at St. Mungo's detected a second curse on the engagement ring but they couldn't tell what it was." Hermione nodded and waited for Ginny to continue.

“So, Sirius went to number twelve, Grimmauld Place to talk to his mother’s portrait.” Hermione’s hand flew to her mouth.

“Oh, god. What did he do?” Hermione knew that whatever Ginny was about to tell her would be bad.

“Harry said that old Walburga told Sirius that you were going to die and that there was nothing that could save you and that she laughed at him for it.” A second hand flew to Hermione’s mouth.

“She didn’t!” Hermione parted her hands to whisper. She let her hands drop to her lap. “What did he do to her, Ginny.”

“He set her on fire. Professor Lupin said he used Fiendfyre.” A little yelp escaped Hermione.

“Is number twelve still standing?”

Ginny slowly shook her head. “Professor Lupin pulled him out but Sirius ran back in and cursed every portrait in the house. Harry said that Sirius was trying kill himself.”

“Kill himself?” Hermione wanted to run upstairs and slap Sirius and then pull him into her arms. She knew on thing for sure though. She would have to wait for him to come to her about this. “I won’t say a word about this Ginny. Thank you for telling me.”

“So, how’s it going with you two?” Ginny had heard from her mother that things had slowed down between these two. She remembered the ruckus from Christmas Day. The whole house buzzed with Hermione and Sirius’ antics from the day before.

Hermione giggled softly. “Well, we were snogging this morning.”

“That’s all?”

“What do you mean that’s all?” Hermione considered that to be huge.

Ginny grinned evilly at her friend. “Oh, nothing. I just remember catching the two of you in the downstairs bathroom”

“Not you, too!” Hermione sounded miserable. Was there anyone who hadn’t caught them?

“Oh, yes...me too!” Ginny went into theatrics, mimicking what she had heard.

“Oh, god Sirius.” Ginny used a breathy voice to mock Hermione.

“Stop it!”

“Oh, Hermione! I love your tight little...” Ginny lowered her voice to sound like Sirius and giggled when she got to a word she knew she shouldn’t say.

‘Stop it, Ginny!’

Ginny made a series of grunting and moaning sounds.

“Ginny, please!” Hermione begged her friend for mercy.

“Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes!” Ginny finished her demonstration with high, fast moaning sounds. She rolled around on the couch in a fit of giggles.

Hermione glared at her friend. “Thanks a lot.”

“My pleasure.” Ginny wiped tears out of the corners of her eyes.

Ginny recovered and decided to try and wheedle information out of Hermione. She knew her mother would be pleased that things were heating up.

“So, snogging?”

Hermione blushed and nodded.

“Good kisser?”

“Great, great kisser.” Hermione let out a little sigh as she remembered.

“So...when do you think you’ll, you know...”

“Soon. I’ve just got to get comfortable with the idea.” Hermione looked away, her body was already comfortable with the idea but her head was still reeling.

“Everyone says how happy you two were and they weren’t just talking about sex either. You were good together.” Ginny remembered how they were together on Christmas Day after she brought him downstairs. Sirius had lost a lot of his darkness and Hermione had become a bit more carefree.

“I’m beginning to feel that, too. I don’t know how to explain it but I think I might already be in love with him.” Hermione spoke with wonder at the possibility of that.

“When do you think you’ll tell him?” Ginny thought about how ecstatic her mother would be.

“When I know for sure. It’s like a feeling I get from someplace that I can’t define. It’s just there and it has been since I woke up in the hospital.” Hermione smiled softly.

“So how are you doing?” Ginny took a critical look Hermione.

“Well, obviously my motor skills are much better.” Hermione gestured to her legs.

“I know! I was so impressed when you took the stairs by yourself. Mum said you were having trouble getting around.” Ginny was pleased that Hermione was getting back to herself. “What about the rest?”

“The migraines are much better. I only had two last week. The only thing that is still giving me a lot of trouble is the seizures.” Hermione had a seizure almost every day. Sirius was rather worried because they should have been getting better.

“I’m so sorry about all this.” Ginny wrapped her arms around Hermione in a warm, comforting hug. “So...what are we going to do today. I don’t know if you’ve noticed but this house needs help.” Ginny patted her friend on the leg.

“Sirius said I could do whatever I wanted with the place.” She had been getting to know the place as she pondered the changes she wanted to make.

“It’s just so...male...”

“You want to go shopping? We could take a trip to Diagon Alley.” Hermione thought a shopping trip with Ginny would be a wonderful way to spend the afternoon.

“I think we should start with the family room.” Ginny and Hermione stood up to go and survey the house.

“It got the worst of it, didn’t it?” Hermione grabbed a hold of both banisters as she ascended the steps.

“Definitely!”

They entered the kitchen and made their way into the family room. The house was lost somewhere in the nineteen eighties and was in desperate need of a little feminization. The girls put their hands on everything and discussed possible changes. They didn’t even notice when Sirius emerged from the bedroom freshly showered and changed.

“Thinking of taking a shopping trip?” Sirius stood in the entrance of the family room, a slow smile spreading across his face.

“Do you mind?” Hermione turned and smiled at him.

“Of course not. I think we should take care of the account this time though.” Hermione made a little motion of protest at his suggestion. “Oh, come on, Hermione! How are you supposed to go shopping without money? You don’t want to drag me along from store to store.”

“He’s got a point, Hermione.” Ginny was surprised that Hermione was fighting this.

“It just feels weird.”

“You can’t make a dent that I can’t handle, sweetheart. There’s plenty of gold for whatever you want to buy.” He walked up behind her and wrapped his arms around her, laying a bunch of little kisses along her neck.

Hermione struggled to think of a retort but her brain was clouding over. She looked over at Ginny who was looking at her with a smug grin. Ginny was pleased to see them getting back to normal. When she got back to Hogwarts she was going to have to write a long letter to her mother. Hermione scowled at her friend but resigned to the fact that she would have to give in. He wasn’t going to play fair.

“Fine, fine...I can see I’m not going to win this one.” Sirius let her go, she turned to look at him and felt a little annoyed at the smirk that was firmly planted on his face. It was a reminder that he knew her better than she realized.

“Excellent!” He had no trouble manipulating her with sex. He was going to win this particular battle, any means necessary. “Well, shall we?” Sirius guided Hermione toward the fireplace with a hand at her back.

The three of them left for Diagon Alley by floo for a day of shopping. Sirius added her to his account after which she and Ginny spent a load of his gold on a new family room. Everything was delivered the next day and with the help of Ginny, Remus and Tonks they put together a new family room.

When they were done Hermione took a step back and realized for the first time that the house felt like it wasn't just Sirius', it was theirs.

[illegible]

A/N: Thanks for the reviews!

I'm sorry I didn't get around to many personal review replies this time. I was working on this chapter. It was an important one and I needed to get it right.

Special thanks to Tasseer1!

Memories

Hermione's father and Sirius excused themselves from the table with parting compliments and thanks for a wonderful meal. Herman Granger was excited about showing Sirius his butterfly collection and had been describing it throughout dinner. Sirius wore a bemused expression and allowed himself be led away. Hermione was pleased that Sirius humored her father and that he did it so good naturedly.

Hermione was about to get up to help clear the table but was stilled by her mother's hand on hers. She sat back in her chair and looked into her mother's smiling face.

"It's good to see you doing so much better." Jean Granger touched her hand to her daughter's face.

"Thanks, mum." Hermione had been looking forward to talking with her mother. They had been getting together like this about once a week. First at the Black's home but Hermione's progress made a visit to her parent's a possibility. This was the first time she had her mother to herself.

"Are you all ready for tomorrow?" Hermione would be viewing events from other people's memories through a pensieve.

"I think so, I'm a little nervous." She was grateful her mother asked. She would be seeing what she missed and was worried she would pine all the harder for the real memories. "I don't want to be more upset after seeing what I can't remember."

"Do you have an idea of what you'll be seeing?" She had considered further pain for her daughter as a possible short coming of this plan.

"I've been told about all the events. It all sounds like stories from someone else's life or just a reminder of what I've missed." Jean Granger's heart ached for her daughter's pain.

“You know, you don’t have to do this.” She lay a comforting hand on Hermione’s.

“I know...I want to though. I really do.” Hearing her daughter’s resolute words, she decided to change the subject.

“So, how are you keeping yourself busy these days?” Jean Granger was worried that her normally driven daughter would be frustrated with a slower lifestyle.

“A lot of studying, self paced so I’ve got to be disciplined.” Hermione missed the stress from Hogwarts, she thrived on the rewards from her hard work. “I have a new living room, we just redecorated. You haven’t been over since we finished.”

“Well, a library and a new living room. He certainly spoils you.” She was still impressed by all the work her son-in-law put into the library, not to mention the small fortune he must have spent. “I know that it was difficult for you to leave your school, having such a lovely pace to study must help. I’m sure you’ll be ready for your test.”

“It’s marvelous, isn’t it? Never thought I’d have my own library!” Hermione couldn’t hide how pleased she was. It was an extravagance and while she wasn’t normally given to such, she could make an exception this one time. “He really does spoil me, too much I think.”

“I never appreciated just how much money Sirius had.” The Grangers were doctors with their own practice, they were by no means poor. Even so, Sirius seemed to spend like it was nearly bottomless.

The pleased look suddenly darkened. “He added me to his account at Gringott’s.” Hermione spoke with a grumble in her voice.

“Well, you are married, dear. What could be the matter with that?” She knew Hermione’s discomfort was likely due to her hesitancy in fully accepting the marriage. “You don’t want to ask him every time

you make a purchase. What about trips to market or shopping for clothes. He did the right thing if you asked me”

“I guess so. It feels like I’m taking something that’s not mine.” Hermione released a small frustrated sigh.

“So, you’re having trouble taking my advice?” She had hoped her daughter would be more open minded.

“What was that?” Hermione pursed her lips in a puzzled frown.

“To give him a chance.” Agitation tinged her voice, which then softened. “He seems to be a devoted husband, Hermione.”

“Oh, he is...and I am, I really am.” She wondered if she should tell her mother about the recent change between them.

“Good, well that’s good.”

“We’ve been dating.” Hermione wore a pleased grin. Since they came to their understanding Sirius had commenced his woo of her.

“ Dating? That sounds promising.” Jean was pleased by his cleverness. It seemed to have a positive affect on Hermione.

“Just in the last week, out for dinner together a couple of times.” Hermione was clearly enjoying the attention he was showering her with. “He’s taking me to something tomorrow, it’s called Wyvern Wonders. It’s some sort of wizard performance art.”

“That sounds...interesting...”

“It’s basically dance and magic set to music. I don’t know how he got tickets, it’s been sold out for months.” Sirius had a way of making things happen when he wanted them badly enough.

“You’ll have to tell me about that one.” Jean thought she heard the men returning and would need to rush to her point. “I must say that I like that he is making such an effort.”

“Oh, he’s made an effort from the start. I’m glad he’s settled a bit. At first he practically littered the house with presents. If it wasn’t for his friend I’d have gained ten pounds eating all the chocolate he left for me.” Her mother was glad her daughter had someone so interested in keeping her happy.

“He was just anxious, Hermione. None of us were sure how you were going to react to living with him.” She paused to listen for the men once again, she had told her husband to distract Sirius for a bit.

“I know, neither was I.”

“So, it certainly sounds like you two are getting along well.” Jean Granger decided to get straight to the point. “How are things in the bedroom?”

Hermione stared at her mother opened mouthed, a blush rising on her cheeks. “Mum!”

“Sorry, dear. But that’s important in a marriage and I knew you might have some trouble with it.” It wasn’t a terribly comfortable conversation but she felt it was an important one. “So?”

“We’re taking it slowly.” Hermione’s voice dropped, betraying how shy she felt discussing this. “There’s more to it though. I have feelings for him but I don’t know what they mean or where they come from.”

“You were in love, maybe that’s not tied to memory per se.” She cocked her head to the side and smiled encouragingly at Hermione.

“We’ve...” Hermione paused to blush. “We’ve snogged.” She glanced at her mother who was beaming.

“Jesus, Mary and Joseph! That’s a relief!”

“Mum!”

Hermione was saved from further embarrassment as Sirius and Hermione’s father returned, chatting about specimen collection. The two men had an easy rapport and it pleased Hermione. The four of them retired to the living room for a brandy. They spent another hour together chatting about this and that before Hermione and Sirius left for home.

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Hermione was nervous about the coming afternoon at Hogwarts, she was going to be viewing memories through Dumbledore’s pensieve. Several people were gathering there for her benefit. She moved about the living room, straightening things that didn’t need straightening. After her third pass on the same painting Sirius pulled her onto the couch with him, settling her on his lap.

“Nervous?”

Hermione released a short clipped breath. “Yes.”

“Why?”

“I’m a little afraid of what I’ll be seeing today.” She balanced herself a little nervously in his lap.

“Does this bother you?” He tilted his head to the side to look at her face.

“Just not used to it.” She was still wobbling, not quite sure what to do.

“Why don’t you come here and just relax.” He pulled her against his chest gently, using a soothing tone of voice.

She allowed herself to be pulled into him, finding his warmth and the rumbling sound of his voice in his chest very comforting. Once she

was there she snuggled against him tightly. He traced her spine gently with his fingers.

“So, what has you nervous about today?”

“I guess I’m worried about...well, about feeling depressed about what I’ve missed.” Her hands were cautiously placed against his strong, hard chest. She could feel the play of muscles beneath her fingers.

“You can always decide not to go. Everyone will understand if you’re not ready.” He let his hands rest at her hips.

“I don’t want to do that. I’d like to see my accomplishments. The whole business with the golems is fascinating.” She bravely let her arms encircle his neck.

It was heaven to Sirius, to have his sweet wife draped on his chest, her legs straddling his cautiously. She kept a slight distance between their groins, causing her to be a little sway backed. She had to reposition as she began to slip off his lap.

“I think you’ll be pleased with the golems, it was all your idea, you know.” He tenderly kissed the top of her head. “When are we supposed to be there?”

“We’ve got about an hour.” Tired of slipping Hermione hugged her body up against his.

“There’s something I need to tell you about.” Sirius encouraged her into a sitting position on his lap. He and Remus had decided to show her the fire, it wasn’t one of her memories but it made a strange kind of sense that they take this opportunity.

“Hmm?”

“Um...I did something and you’re probably going to see it today.” Hermione wondered if she was about to hear about the fire. He was having trouble meeting her eyes.

“Is this about the fire at number twelve, Grimmauld Place?” Sirius looked up at her in surprise. He narrowed his eyes at her.

“Yeah. Who told.”

“Ginny.”

“I’m going to...” She put a hand to his mouth.

“No, you’re not. I’m glad she told me. I do have a question about it though.” Hermione slid off his lap to sit next to him on the couch. She faced him, knees under her.

“What’s that?”

“Well, my mum said Dumbledore was injured in a magical fire.” She watched the guilt play across his face.

“Yeah, it was the same one. He nearly died.” Sirius looked away. Hermione waited quietly as he got control of his emotions. “I just lost control, I’ve never felt...” Sirius sighed a ragged breath. “After I spoke with my mother’s portrait I thought I would return to the hospital to find you dead. I couldn’t imagine going on without you.” She reached for him, snaking her arms around his neck. He wrapped one arm around her back, the other under her legs and pulled her back into his lap.

“I don’t know what I would have done if you died.” He pulled her head against his chest. “You make me feel young again, Hermione. Like I didn’t waste my life away in a cell, like Azkaban never happened.”

Sirius felt a bubble of rage rise up through his chest, rage at himself for his carelessness and his stupidity. She would never reminisce about Mexico with him or about the moment they both realized that one day they would be parents together or a thousand other things. His selfishness had been her ruination. Suddenly, he almost couldn’t

bear to feel her in his arms, he considered getting up, getting away, when he felt her shake lightly.

Hermione squeezed her eyes tightly against the tears, she didn't want to cry. She hated crying but despite her best effort the tears came anyway and soon she was sobbing. She wanted to remember, to feel all these things that he felt, to even fathom a tenth of what they had shared.

His attention was instantly drawn off of himself and to her and her pain. Her sobs tore at him and he knew he had to endure her anguish, the sound of it was abrasive on his nerves. A further reminder of what he had done. He held her while she sobbed, softly whispering his heartfelt apologies until she went quiet. Each of them felt comforted by the new silence that was left in the wake of her tears.

They sat like that, quietly enjoying each other for several long moments. He noticed she was playing with the bracelet at his wrist.

“You gave me that.”

“I did?”

Sirius shook his wrist to move the bracelet down. He undid the clasp and let it fall off his hand into hers. It landed in her hand with a soft ‘chink.’ She picked it up and examined it.

“Turn it over.”

She turned the bracelet over and read the inscription out loud.

“My heart is yours, Hermione.” She looked at him in wonder. It was the first piece of tangible proof that what everyone was telling her was true. It was nearly a message to herself.

“I also have a letter from you. Your first ‘I love you’ is on that letter. I’ve always got it on me.” Sirius reached into his robes and pulled out a folded piece of parchment. He handed it to her.

Hermione opened the letter with reverence and trepidation. She should have known that she would have written something down. She was constantly writing although it was nearly always for school. This business with her memory made her wish she kept a diary. She had tried on several occasions but she always got so busy with her studies that the diary would once again lay forgotten. Hermione was interested in results and diaries were always about the journey.

Hermione read over the letter, she took a glance at Sirius. She gestured with the letter in hand.

“How angry were you?”

“Furious, actually. At all three of you.” Hermione hummed and nodded, she was almost glad she didn’t have that memory.

“Not that I ever got a chance to tell you.” She looked at him with an eyebrow cocked in question.

“Well, when I found you my cousin Bellatrix was seconds away from killing you. It was difficult to feel angry with you when I was just relieved that you were still alive.” He took her hand in his and gave it a little squeeze.

“You do a lot of that, don’t you?” She squeezed his hand back.

“What’s that?” He smiled, wondering what she could be referring to.

“Almost losing me.” He let out a sigh.

“Too much.”

Hermione turned her attention back to the letter in her hand. She rubbed her thumb on a particular sentence in the letter. She read it over a couple of times, realizing that it held truth for her. It really didn’t matter anymore that she couldn’t point to a logical reason for why she felt the way she did. The emotion of love had come into it’s own with her. She was ready to own it and even order her life according to it’s pull. She had never felt anything like it. The more she accepted it, the

more powerful it became. She realized in that moment that everything was going to change.

She turned in his lap and kissed him with all the love that she felt for him. She told him she was ready for all the love he had to offer with her kiss. She was ready to link her life to his forever, all doubt pushed resolutely away.

Sirius was momentarily stunned, he hadn't expected the letter to bring forth such a strong reaction. He recovered quickly and responded eagerly to her advances.

Never leaving each other's lips, Sirius pushed her back against the couch. They broke apart long enough for him to reposition himself over her. Sirius covered her mouth with his as his body pressed hers into the couch. He slowed them down because he wanted this moment to last as long as possible.

He sensed she was ready for greater intimacy, although not to what extent. He ran cautious hands all over her body, smoothing them down her sides, over her breasts, caressing her pussy. He continued with increased intensity when she didn't shy away or protest. She moaned as his hands lit a fire in her belly. She let her body guide her actions, arching into him, feeling her resolve slip.

The clock in the living room chimed.

Sirius swore.

"Oh Merlin, we forgot. How did we forget?" Her voice was slightly panicked.

"We tend to do that." His words ended with an amused chuckle.

They were going to have to leave, as soon as possible. They were already late.

She found herself understanding with perfect clarity how he had taken her in the kitchen and the library and the bathroom and even in

the hallway. She could see herself following his naughty impulses, her personal Pied Piper.

“Come on, baby. We have to go. They’re all waiting for us.”

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Hermione stepped into Professor Dumbledore's office and was greeted by a large group of people. They were prepared for a long afternoon together. Hermione was going to get highlights from the last six months from the memories of the people who had lived it with her. Harry, Ron and Ginny were there with big smiles for her.

Harry, Ron and Ginny each hugged her in turn and then discussed what she wanted to witness. Ginny reminded everyone about the business with Malfoy.

“You should show her what Ron did to Malfoy that morning.” Harry smiled at his girlfriend and nodded.

“You were the only one that witnessed most of the confrontations with him but you could see what we did about it.” Harry was pleased that Ginny thought of it. “Ron was the one that noticed Hermione reading the letter. We should use his memory.”

Ron put his wand to his head and pulled out the silver threads, his memory of that morning. He let it drop into the pensieve and swirled it around. He stepped back and let Hermione dip her head to the rune covered bowl. She disappeared for about fifteen minutes. When she emerged she turned to Ron and hugged him fiercely.

“Thank you.”

“Anything for you, Hermione.”

Sirius looked over at the pair and felt a lurch in his stomach. At one point in time there had been something between these two. He felt a slight annoyance at their hug but shrugged it off as best he could.

Sirius looked up to see Harry scowling at him. Sirius quickly looked away. He knew what Harry was trying to tell him. These three had been best friends for years and he was making a mistake by reading something into it.

“Alright,” said Harry. “She should probably see what happened when Malfoy had to make his apology.”

Sirius was about to offer his memory but Professor Dumbledore beat him do it.

“I think you will find my memory to be rich in detail from that morning.” He put his wand to his head and then dipped it into the pensieve.

Hermione dipped her head into once again. She was gone for about twenty five minutes this time. When she emerged she stepped toward Sirius. He opened his arms to her and she practically flung herself at him. They exchanged no words but forgot themselves in a deep kiss.

Dumbledore coughed politely.

They broke apart with sheepish looks on their faces. She thought about what Mrs. Weasley and Ginny had told her about them and wondered if it was typical of them to forget their surroundings. It was easy to get swept up in him.

One after another, Hermione reviewed her life from someone else's point of view. When they were finally done it was early evening. They had taken both their lunch and their dinner in Professor Dumbledore's office.

Hermione and Sirius returned home exhausted, practically falling into bed.

[illegible]

A/N: Thank you for the reviews!

I've been terrible about responding to reviews. I promise to do so for this chapter!

Thanks Tasseer1

Love, part 1

Hermione stared unblinking at the ceiling in the still darkened room. She was chewing her bottom lip, thinking, pondering, stressing. When she put it all together yesterday she had been so caught up in the moment she forgot to say the words. She let out a soft sigh and screwed up her courage. She was resolved to wake him up and tell him. Her life was about to change completely.

Hermione sleepily patted the spot in bed next to her, her arm stretched farther and farther, her hand patting the whole way. She moved her body toward his side, still patting the bed. She was feeling for Sirius' form next to her but to her disappointment she found he had already gotten up.

Hermione had hoped to cuddle with him this morning and tell him how she felt. She wanted him to know what she had discovered about her own feelings. She wasn't exactly sure how these things were done. She thought she had a workable plan but her efforts had been thwarted. Her stress level was beginning to rise.

The morning sun began to peek through the bedroom window as she stroked her hand over Crookshanks for comfort. She considered marching out of the bedroom, finding Sirius and just telling him, just get the first one out of the way. She shook her head, she still felt a little off balance and lacked the confidence for such a bold move.

She could wait for him to say it to her, he tried not to smother her with his feelings and only said it every so often. She had been appreciative of that up until today, today he could throw open the bedroom door and sing it to her. Of course that was never going to happen, not at this stage in their relationship. He saved his honest confession for moments that meant something to both of them.

She could write it down and give it to him, just hand him a folded piece of parchment and walk away and wait for his reaction. No, too cowardly. She was going to have to say it to him, look him in the eye and tell him what was in her heart. Hermione released a frustrated groan. Why was this so hard?

The morning rays fully illuminated their bedroom. Crookshanks jumped off the bed and pawed at the bedroom door. She was so lost in thought it didn't register that he probably wanted to be let out of doors. When she considered how to tell him, she felt shy. There was no fear of rejection, she knew he returned her feelings. He made his affection for her plain from the beginning. She finally decided that she would most likely know when the moment was right. Her stress wasn't really reduced by this but at least it was something.

Hermione was about to get out of bed when Sirius opened the door and walked in. He smiled a big, warm smile at her, sauntered over to the bed and threw himself down next to her.

“Good morning.”

“Good morning, you were up early.”

He chose not to respond to her. Instead he rolled her under him so that he was looking down at her, he dipped his head and gave her a tentative kiss.

Hermione was elated, maybe this wouldn't be so hard after all. She responded eagerly, wrapping her arms around his neck, fisting her hands in his hair. Their kiss was languid and unhurried. Sirius took his time, letting her passion build. He was still thinking about what they had started on the couch the day before. She had been responsive to his more intimate touch, he wondered how much more she might be open to. There was only one way to find out. He reached a hand up to caress her breast, massaging it gently over her bedclothes, dragging his thumb across her nipple.

A quiet moan escaped Hermione as she arched into his hand. Sirius' lips left hers in search of pleasure points along her neck. She forgot entirely that she had something to say, her senses were overwhelmed with him. She breathed in his scent, felt his warm breath on her skin. When she felt his hand travel down her belly, following a slow track southward, she bucked her hips to hurry him along. If his hands felt good over her blue jeans she could only

imagine how much better they would feel with only her flannel pajamas in the way.

“Hermione?” She seemed to be on a faster track than he had prepared himself for. He wanted to be sure, wanted to give her every opportunity to slow down if that was what she needed. He pulled back to read her expression and was met with a look he knew only too well. There was no doubt in her eyes, only lust and need.

He had intended on warming her up and then leaving her wanting. He planned on wearing down her resolve slowly until she was practically begging him to make love to her. He was surprised but more than happy to make an adjustment in his plan.

Hearing her name on his lips she remembered what she wanted to say to him. They were wrapped in each other’s arms, on the verge of making love for the first time. She could think of no better time.

“Sirius, I...”

The doorbell rang.

“Remus and Tonks are here.” Sirius kissed the tip of her nose and left the bed.

“Remus and Tonks?” She sat up in the bed.

“Don’t you remember? We’re having breakfast together. Then you ladies are spending the afternoon shopping.” He paused in the doorway before leaving the room altogether. He closed the door quietly behind him.

“Oh, right.” She spoke more to herself.

Then what was this all about? A tease?

“Well, be sensible Hermione. It’s not like he thought you would be ready for more.” Now she was openly speaking to herself.

Hermione realized there was nothing for it. She got out of bed and prepared to meet her guests.

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Sirius answered the door and welcomed Remus and Tonks inside. He told them Hermione had gotten a late start but would be out in a minute. They retired to the living room and chatted while they waited on her. They were Apparating to the Leakey Cauldron together and then Sirius and Remus had a few errands to run. Hermione and Tonks had made plans to do some shopping in Diagon Alley.

Sirius and Remus had a very close friendship, it made sense that Tonks and Hermione got to know each other better. She and Remus had been dating for months, after the burning at number twelve, Grimmauld Place he had moved in with her. When he would pop the question was a popular piece of gossip in their social circle.

Hermione knew Tonks mostly as another adult in the Order of the Phoenix, a young adult, but an adult just the same. They had met when Hermione was just fifteen and Tonks was working as an Auror. Tonks had entertained Hermione and Ginny with her ability as a Metamorphmagus. They were on equal footing now and wanted to get to know each other on that level.

Hermione emerged, ready for her day and greeted her guests. She apologized for keeping them waiting. She walked over and sat down next to Sirius, placing her head on his shoulder. A look passed between the two men that went unnoticed by Hermione and Tonks. They sat around and talked for about ten minutes before leaving.

Hermione had not Apparated on her own since she had been cursed, she let Sirius take her along with him for safety. They landed in the alley behind the Leakey Cauldron and walked around to the front. They found a table and ordered. They chatted amiably while they waited for their breakfast.

“I can’t believe you actually got tickets to see the Wyvern Wonders.” Tonks smiled at Hermione and gave her a wink. “How did you manage it?”

“Fame has its perks, cousin.” Sirius wore a smug grin, he was quite proud of his score.

Tonks snorted. “Infamous, more like.”

“How did you manage it?” Hermione cocked her eyebrow at him.

“I can’t tell you all my secrets.” He dropped his tone to speak in her ear. His warm breath tickled and made her shiver. He brushed her neck with his lips.

Remus coughed.

Tonks rolled her eyes.

Hermione blushed.

“So, what are you two up to today? You haven’t dropped what your errand is about.” Tonks made room for the waiter to put her plate of food down.

Remus and Sirius exchanged a look that Hermione caught but Tonks didn’t. Tonks looked up expectantly with a smile on her face.

“Erm...” Remus stalled.

“You two aren’t ditching us to go drinking are you?” There was a playful tone in Tonks’ voice, she was clearly teasing.

“That’s it, Nymphadora.” Sirius used her given name to frustrate her. “We’re off to get pissed.”

“Don’t call me that!” Tonks was red in the face.

“What? I think it’s a lovely name. Just rolls right off the tongue.” Sirius continued to goad her, he was just hitting his stride.

“Do you have a dress for tonight?” Remus shifted the conversation to relieve his girlfriend of Sirius’ torture. His question was directed at Hermione.

“No, I was hoping we could find something today.” Hermione gave Remus a knowing smile, she felt certain she knew what the guys were up to. He looked at her in genuine surprise.

Remus caught her attention and glanced at Sirius. Hermione shook her head but just slightly, so as not to be obvious. She was pleased to have figured out the secret. Sirius wouldn’t have said anything but not just because it was Remus’ business. He was worried if Hermione knew it would be an unhappy reminder of what happened to her.

“Always the clever witch, Hermione.” Remus praised her ability to read the situation.

Sirius was about to tease Tonks again but his attention was diverted to the exchange between Remus and Hermione. He looked between them but all he got were interested smiles. He raised an eyebrow at his friend who shook his head slightly.

“Why is everyone so quiet all of a sudden?” Tonks looked at the three of them like they were up to something. The three of them broke out into conversation about the weather and such. She narrowed her eyes at Sirius which was fine by him, it took the attention away from what they were off to do that day. She was not to be deterred. “So, where are you going? You’re so mysterious about it.”

“It’s some silly thing from their school days. Sirius will only tell me it’s a Marauder’s secret.” Sirius looked at her in surprise. He looked over at Remus who nodded and then shrugged.

“You are the clever witch, aren’t you?” Sirius whispered seductively in her ear. He paused like he was considering something before he addressed a question with her. “Are you alright?”

“Sure, why wouldn’t I be?” Hermione hadn’t associated Tonks’ ring with her own.

Sirius rubbed her ring finger on her left hand with a concerned look. Hermione instantly understood his fears and leaned into him and kissed his shoulder.

“I’m fine, I promise.”

“Are you two at it again?” Tonks was pleased to see them getting back to normal but couldn’t help herself. She owed Sirius a little payback.

“Hopefully.” He kept his voice soft and low so that only Hermione could hear him. He had a sense that things were changing between them, he sincerely hoped so anyway.

Hermione felt butterflies fluttering in her belly, she glanced shyly at him and smiled, wishing they had the day to themselves.

Tonks balled up her napkin and threw it at Sirius, a playful scowl planted on her face. Sirius nuzzled Hermione’s neck before tearing his attention away.

“I think we’re going to have to separate you two. Come on Hermione, let’s go shopping.” Remus and Sirius stood politely as the women got up to leave.

Sirius reached out a hand to gently grab Hermione’s wrist. He tugged her over to him and placed a chaste kiss on her forehead. “Buy whatever you want, sweetheart. I want to show you off tonight.”

“Happy hunting! Tonks is going to be thrilled!” Hermione whispered excitedly in his ear.

“Shh!” Sirius laughed lightly and looked over at Tonks who was similarly engaged with Remus.

Hermione and Tonks set off for Diagon Alley, their men watched as they left. Remus turned to Sirius, he paused to consider his phrasing.

“So, the nudge seems to be at least somewhat successful.” He recalled their earlier conversation about Sirius’ anguish over Hermione’s memory loss.

“I really haven’t nudged that hard.” He was thinking about earlier that morning, there was something different about her.

“I didn’t really think you’d have to.” Remus partially confessed his belief in her love for Sirius. When he and Sirius started work on the library the full moon had just passed. His senses were still quite heightened, he had made a point to try and read her. She radiated deep affection whenever Sirius was close to her, not to mention attraction. He didn’t say anything to Sirius, it was still unclear how things were going to unfold. Sirius would be hurt once again with that knowledge if things didn’t work out.

“What do you mean?” Sirius felt there was more to what Remus was saying.

“Shouldn’t we head to Hogsmeade?” Remus had no intention of clarifying himself. Things were still far too uncertain. Sirius didn’t need false hope.

“Yeah.” There was a definite complaint in his tone but he knew better than to push. If Remus was holding back he had a good reason for it.

They left the Leaky Cauldron, walked around to the alley in back and Apparated to Hogsmeade to select Tonks’ engagement ring.

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Tonks watched with a small smile as Hermione allowed herself to be measured by an overly helpful attendant. It had been Tonks’ idea to try this boutique, it was upscale and would have the sort of dress Hermione would need that night. She had tried to argue with Tonks,

complaining that the store was overpriced and that she would be better off with a simple dress.

Neither girl had much experience buying dresses, they really needed Ginny for this. Tonks had agreed to help as a favor to Sirius. She feared she would be no better at dress selection than Hermione. Fortunately, her mother had given her the name of the store.

“Hermione...anyone who is anyone in wizard society will be there. Sirius wants you to dress the part.” She had been warned that Hermione would balk and that she may not understand the significance of their night out.

“I thought he didn’t put any store by that elitist nonsense.” Hermione was surprised to hear Tonks speak this way.

“He doesn’t and neither should you but they do. Be proud of your heritage Hermione, do yourself proud by playing their game even better than they play it themselves. You are married to the Black Heir and you’re a muggleborn. I don’t think that’s ever happened before. All eyes will be on you, even without Sirius’ little corner of fame.” Hermione listened to Tonks, her anxiety level going up with every word.

“You make him sound like royalty, Tonks.” Hermione took on a scolding tone.

“To society wizards, he practically is.” Hermione considered what Tonks said, quietly chewing her bottom lip.

The attendant finished measuring Hermione and suggested she look through their gowns.

Hermione paused and then turned on her heel to face Tonks. “I don’t understand...Wyvern Wonders?”

“Oh, the production doesn’t matter. It’s the venue that matters. The historic Queen Maeve Theater, they only do one production a month to keep it exclusive. They’ll have house elves all over the place

offering horderves and wine..it'll be fun." Tonks turned her around and pointed her in the direction of the gowns.

"So you've been?"

"No, my mother told me about it." She started flipping through dresses. She pulled out a skimpy red dress with gold sequins and an asymmetrical cut that started mid thigh on one side and ended mid calf on the other. "You have to go in red and gold."

Hermione took one look at the dress and laughed.

"Why?" She took the dress from Tonks and hung it up.

"Well, it will offset all the silver and green." Hermione blanched.

"Only purebloods?" Hermione pulled out a red satin dress with a sweet neckline, the bodice was covered in gold beading. She held it up to her body for Tonks' opinion.

"No, of course not but you'll see the wealthiest in wizard society. You know how lousy Slytherin is with rich families. You'll also meet well placed ministry officials and sundry other famous types." Tonks fiddled with the sash and wrinkled her nose. Hermione hung it back up.

"This is supposed to be fun, right?" Hermione raised a skeptical eyebrow.

"You're going to have a great time." Tonks held up a red chiffon and satin gown with crisscross ruching on the bodice. Hermione took one look at how low the neckline plunged and shook her head.

"The show is supposed to be quite good. I was looking forward to it but I'm not sure now." Hermione pulled out a gold dress and stifled a giggled. The flair of ruffles that began in an open front reminded her of a tentacled sea monster. She shook her head in disbelief and hung it back on the rack.

“The Wyvern Wonders new show is sold out wherever it goes, you’re going to be hobnobbing with the rich and famous...why wouldn’t you have a wonderful evening?” Hermione had to admit that Tonks made a point, she still felt a bit in over her head.

Hermione pulled out a strapless red dress with a defined, ribbed bodice that was beautifully decorated in gold beading. It opened into an A-line brushed silk skirt with a small, subtle bow on the lower edge of the bodice resting over the left hip. It was the first dress that held any appeal for her. She held it up for Tonks who cooed her approval.

The attendant and Hermione entered a dressing room where the dress was magically altered to fit her perfectly. Hermione walked out and coughed to get Tonks’ attention, she looked up and mouthed ‘wow.’

Hermione looked like a princess in red and gold, she was radiant. She looked at herself in the mirror and both hands flew to her mouth, her eyes wide. She had to admit that the dress was perfect for her. It accentuated both her bust and waist lines without leaving her feeling exposed. She looked at herself from every angle, it was perfect. The moment was ruined for her when she looked at the price tag.

There was no way she was going to drop that much gold for a dress.

“Oh, no you don’t. You’re buying that dress!”

“You’re only saying that because you haven’t seen the price tag.” Hermione took another turn in front of the mirror. She looked longingly at the dress, she thought of herself as a rather plain girl but not in this gown. She ran her fingers through her hair wondering what in the world she was going to do with it.

“There’s a beauty spa in Hogsmeade.” Tonks had been watching Hermione’s self examination. Her thoughts were as plain as if she’d spoken them.

“You’ve been to a beauty spa?” Hermione scoffed.

“No, my mother goes once a month.” Tonks stuck her tongue out.

“That’s just more money I’ll have to spend.” Hermione took a step toward the dressing room. “And I don’t have shoes to go with this dress.”

“You were going to have to buy shoes anyway.” Tonks had no intention of letting her off that easy.

Hermione cast a dark look at Tonks.

“Either you buy the dress now or I’ll ask the store to hold it for you and Sirius will come pick it up.” Tonks could see just how badly Hermione wanted to allow herself to have this little pleasure.

Hermione turned huffily into the dressing room with the attendant. The attendant returned to the front of the store with the dress. She packaged it magically so that when Hermione got it home there would be no wrinkles in it. Tonks was pleased that her little ultimatum had worked.

Hermione dressed and returned to the front and paid for her dress. She simply could not believe she was actually leaving with it. Tonks slid up next to her at the counter with a smug grin.

“Must run in the family.” Hermione grumped at Tonks.

“What runs in the family?”

“That look.”

Tonks just rolled her eyes at Hermione.

“So...Hogsmeade? Oh, and don’t forget, we still have shoes to buy.” She and Hermione left the boutique and turned into Diagon Alley. “I’ll take you side along with me.”

Tonks took Hermione by the hand, they disappeared with a sharp ‘crack.’

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Sirius and Remus walked out of the Hogs Head and headed down High Street. Mundungus Fletcher had run across them and insisted they have a pint with him. Sirius had an odd fondness for the old crook while Remus remained dubious but courteous. They spent an hour or so together, reminiscing and catching up. Mundungus regaled them with stories from his recent shady exploits and managed to get Sirius to turn one pint into two. Remus announced he had other business that he had to attend to. He and Sirius bade their friend and former colleague good bye.

Sirius and Remus turned down a street that was in a part of Hogsmeade that they visited very infrequently. There were a few dress shops, a store that specialized in delicate magical knickknacks, a shoe store, a jewelry store and a day spa with a popular café, popular with witches anyway. They were the only two wizards on a street littered with witches. Sirius recognized quite a few ladies he had been rather familiar with. More than one waved in friendly greeting.

“Sirius?”

“Yes, love.”

“Never find yourself on this street with Hermione.” Remus cast a sly grin at his friend.

“Duly noted.”

Sirius and Remus approached the jewelry store, they were about to enter when Sirius heard a female voice call out his name. Remus looked around Sirius and saw who it was.

“Take care, Padfoot.”

“You worry too much, Moony.”

Remus cast a worried glance at Sirius but said nothing more as he entered the jewelry store. Sirius paused to let the witch catch up to him.

“Sirius! Wow! How long has it been?” The leggy, blond witch caught up to Sirius and flashed him a brilliant smile.

“Hello, Lyra. It’s good to see you. How have you been?” Sirius leaned his back against the bricks and lit a cigarette.

“Better now that I’ve run into you.” She stepped a little closer into his space. “I heard a silly rumor that you got married.”

“That silly rumor wouldn’t have been the wedding announcement in the Prophet, would it?” He called her on the double speak.

Lyra stepped back. “So, it’s true?”

“It is.”

“Well...you were always a scoundrel, Sirius.” She took a step forward. “I don’t care that you’re married.” She cooed her words and stepped in closer.

“Don’t embarrass yourself, Lyra.” Sirius knew what sort of woman she was but he never would have guessed she would entertain a dalliance with a married man.

His words stung but she was having trouble letting go of his playboy image. This was a wizard with a weakness for witches, he was known for it.

“I know you, Sirius. A lot better than she does, I’ll wager. You don’t have to play games with me.” She traced a finger down his chest.

Sirius released a bored sigh and pushed off from the wall. “See you later, Lyra.” He turned into the jewelry store to join Remus leaving a hurt and angry Lyra Edgecombe on the sidewalk.

To be continued....

[illegible]

A/N: Thanks for the review!

Special thanks to Tasseer1

I used the word 'snogged' because JKR used it. I just can't see her using a term that was that vulgar.

Please review!

Love, part 2

NC17

Hermione relaxed into her chair with a deep, contented sigh. She had never felt anything so amazing in her whole life. The chair she was reclining in was charmed to deliver peace and relaxation, it felt like a thousand skilled fingers were massaging her whole body. She listened to relaxing, soothing music and she was enveloped in a heavenly scent. This sort of thing always seemed so frivolous to her but she was quickly gaining an appreciation for it. She looked over at her companions and gave them a dreamy smile.

She and Tonks had come to the spa to get some help for Hermione's hair and had run into Tonks' mother Andromeda. Andromeda talked the girls into getting a day of beauty with her. She used guilt for Hermione, expressing a desire to catch up with her, claiming this was the perfect opportunity. Tonks could create any of these changes herself but she wanted Hermione to feel more comfortable, so she joined in.

Hermione was dressed in a plush cotton robe, she was completely naked underneath. The salon witch was setting things into motion. At the same time she was receiving a manicure and a pedicure, the various files, clippers, tints and lotions went to work of their own accord. The salon witch conjured a basin and tipped Hermione's head into it, warm water and shampoo flowed from the tip of her wand. She flicked her wand at Hermione's head, invisible hands went to work on her scalp, washing her hair. It was delightful.

"I was so surprised to see you here, is there something special going on?" Andromeda looked over at Hermione from her chair.

"She's going to the Queen Maeve event tonight, with Sirius." Tonks grinned over at her mother.

"Oh, well...you're going to have a wonderful time. You'll see Ted and I there tonight." Andromeda's salon witch gently turned her head so that she could wash her hair.

Hermione's salon witch rinsed her hair, vanished the basin and helped Hermione into a sitting position. She checked on her fingers and toes, upon seeing everything complete and looking perfect she dismissed the implements.

"Alright, dearie. What do you want to do with your hair?" The salon witch picked her hair up in her hands and examined it carefully.

"Well, I was sort of hoping you could help me with some ideas." Hermione glared wretchedly at her hair in the mirror.

Just as she was about to make some suggestions a very flustered salon witch showed a haughty, angry blond witch to the chair beside her. Andromeda looked over to see it who was, her features darkened into a scowl and she rolled her eyes.

"What's wrong, Lyra? I've never seen you so upset." The salon witch cooed sympathetically to Lyra Edgecombe.

"Men! That's what's wrong." Lyra fumed in her chair which seemed to have no affect on her mood.

Hermione glanced over at her neighbor and gave her a smile. The blond looked at her, blinked and then simply looked away. Hermione was surprised but mostly unaffected, she was trying to be nice but she didn't know this witch. It was none of her concern.

"Hermione, Nymphadora described your dress..." There was a sound of protest from Tonks. "I think you should wear your hair up, with maybe a few tendrils curling in the front."

"Andromeda, is that you?" The blond rudely interrupted.

"Hello, Lyra." Andromeda sounded weary, like she was waiting for something. She glanced at Tonks and then at Hermione. Tonks caught her mother's gist and looked at Hermione with a finger to her lips.

“I just saw your cousin, quite full of himself these days.” Hermione’s eyes widened, she realized just who this witch was talking about.

“ So, you finally caught up to him?” Andromeda sounded exceedingly bored.

“His name has been in the Prophet so much lately, quite a bit of trouble he’s been up to. You’d think he’d be happy to see a friendly face.” Hermione suddenly realized that Sirius must have given this tall, stunningly gorgeous, blond witch the brush off. A happy, dreamy expression softened her face.

“His wife has been rather ill, Lyra. He’s been distracted with her recovery.” Andromeda dropped her little bomb, curious to see what Lyra would do with it.

“Wife!” Scoffed Lyra irritably. “As if that scoundrel has any business being someone’s husband.” Hermione turned angrily to Lyra.

“He’s a rather good husband, actually. I’ll thank you not to speak ill of him.” Hermione dropped her own bomb, rather coolly, challenging Lyra to contradict her.

“Mind your own business.”

“Well, seeing as he is my husband, it is entirely my business.” Hermione watched Lyra’s expression change from irritation, to surprise and then anger.

“You! You’re just a child!” Lyra looked Hermione up and down.

“I’m eighteen.” Lyra gave her a look that suggested she thought eighteen was still too young.

“I hope you know what you’ve gotten yourself into with that one.” Lyra narrowed her eyes at Hermione, hoping to implant an insecurity or two.

“Lyra, I think you need to calm down.” Andromeda suddenly realized that Lyra was capable of doing quite a bit of damage.

“I don’t know...it certainly sounds like he turned you down.” Hermione leveled Lyra with a smile on her face, her eyes glittered with contempt for the witch who dared to speak ill of her wizard.

Lyra opened and closed her mouth a few times. A new respect for the young witch next to her was seeping slowly in. She might have been young but she held her own. She turned her attention away from Hermione and back to the nervous looking salon witch.

“Well, what are you waiting for?” The salon witch quickly went to work on Lyra.

Hermione’s own salon witch looked at her with pride. She bent down to Hermione’s ear and whispered. “Let’s get busy and make you the most beautiful witch at that gala tonight.”

Hermione smiled gratefully. She was trembling slightly, partly with anger at Lyra, partly with nerves. She had just gone head to head with one of Sirius’ ex girlfriends, she was shocked at her daring. She looked over at Andromeda and Tonks who were both staring open mouthed at her. Andromeda recovered first, she gave Hermione a big smile and winked at her.

“I think I know just what to do with you!” The salon witch gave Hermione a big smile. “Just trust me.”

Hermione watched in wonder as the salon witch tamed her hair. The normally somewhat bushy, frizzy hair hung in smooth locks around her face. Then the salon witch pulled some from the front over to one side and fixed it in place, she set some in the back, pulled high and curled over and fixed in large loops. The rest she let hang down the back in large beautiful curls. She took a little peak at Hermione’s new dress to get an idea of the color. She set glittering red stars, artfully placed just in front of where her hair was pulled high. Hermione was speechless.

“Will it last? There are still a few hours before the event starts.” She was afraid to move.

The salon witch smiled comfortingly at Hermione and flicked her wand at Hermione’s hair which glowed a soft purple for just a moment.

“Still soft, see...” She picked up a couple of curls and ran her fingers through them, they bounced right back into place. “We should probably do your make up next.”

“Make up?”

“I want you to put that pompous, self important blow hard to shame tonight.” Her salon witch whispered conspiratorially in her ear.

“Is she going to be there?” Hermione whispered and looked over at Lyra.

Her salon witch nodded and whispered. “Oh yeah. That’s Lyra Edgecombe, she never misses a Queen Maeve night.”

Hermione screwed her face into a puzzled frown and whispered back. “Edgecombe...as in Madam Edgecombe?”

“Yeah, that’s her aunt.” An evil smiled spread across Hermione’s face. She didn’t say anything for fear of being overheard. She didn’t want more trouble with Lyra.

Once again, Hermione watched as she was transformed. The make over was simple, the salon witch merely brought out Hermione’s natural beauty. When she was done with that she added sparkling Diamond Dust to her neck and chest and placed a few small, tasteful red stars on her cheeks.

Andromeda looked over at the completed Hermione and thought to herself that if the red stars were white Hermione would look very much like the perfect bride.

“One last thing.” The salon witch led Hermione away.

“Sirius is going to lose his mind when he sees her.” Tonks admired Hermione as she walked away.

“Especially after they finish her up.” Andromeda gave her daughter an evil smile. “I told them to add a hair removal to her package.”

“Did you really?” Tonks had to laugh.

Hermione returned a few minutes later, fully dressed.

“Where did they take you?” Tonks’ voice dripped with innocence.

“Never you mind.” Hermione was very red in the face.

“Well, dearie. You’re all set for tonight.” She gave Hermione a little wink. She instantly flushed once again.

“Thank you.” She took once last look at herself in the mirror. She could scarcely believe it was her face looking back.

“You’re going to stun tonight, Hermione!” Tonks almost wished that she and Remus could afford to go to something like that.

Hermione and Tonks made one last stop at the shoe store. As they were crossing the street Hermione saw Sirius and Remus walking back toward High Street. She stifled the urge to call out to them and quickly turned Tonks in the opposite direction. Once the shoe purchase was completed she and Tonks left for the Leakey Cauldron where they had a quick bite of late lunch. Tonks brought Hermione home, they spent a few minutes admiring Hermione’s new dress as it hung from the closet door. Hermione was vibrating with anticipatory nerves.

Tonks gave Hermione a parting hug and left for home.

Hermione looked at the time and realized she needed to get into her dress. She unzipped it and stepped in. She pulled it on and was struggling with the zipper when a pair of hands came to her rescue.

“ You could have used your wand.” Sirius chuckled his admonishment.

He looked up to view his witch in the mirror and was rendered speechless. Sirius swallowed dryly.

“Sirius?” He didn’t say anything for a minute. “Oh, you don’t like it.” Hermione felt crushed.

Sirius shook his head to clear it, he placed his hands on her hips, lightly crushing the silk fabric of her dress. He spun her around and stepped back, admiring her with unmasked desire.

“You are the most beautiful witch I have ever known, Hermione.” His words reminded her of Lyra Edgecombe, a witch she considered to be far prettier than herself. She searched his eyes and found only honest truth. Her heart beat against her chest for her wizard, this man who always treated her like she was precious.

“Sirius, I love you.”

He stepped forward and caught her up in passionate kiss, he wrapped an arm around her waist and pulled her possessively against his body. She wrapped her arms around his neck for support, she could feel the kiss down to her toes, it made her legs weak.

“I love you so much, Hermione. You just made me the happiest man in the world.” His mouth descended to hers once again. He walked her backwards to the bathroom counter and set her up on it. He gently parted her legs and stepped in between them, pressing against the fabric of her dress.

“When I get you home tonight I’m making love to you. I won’t be denied any longer.” It was a statement of fact, not a request. There was nothing soft or pleading in his voice, he was staking his claim. Hermione nodded weakly, almost wishing they didn’t have plans, nearly ready to throw the days efforts aside. He released her and stepped back, realizing he was very close to losing control. She

looked like a princess in her dress, with her hair and make up done. Tonks had done her job well, Hermione deserved her night out. He had waited this long, he could wait a little longer.

“I bought something for you today.” He reached into his pocket and pulled out two boxes, one long, one small. He opened the long one and pulled out a necklace, there were three linked trinity knots, the center knot was larger than the others. In the center of each knot was nestled a large diamond. Hermione caught her breath. “There is a powerful protection charm on this one, I’d like for you to wear it always.” He placed the necklace on her neck and fastened the clasp. Hermione turned to look at herself in the mirror, she reached her hand up to touch it.

“Thank you, Sirius. It’s beautiful.” She was awed by his generosity which seemed to flow endlessly.

“I just thought these would look pretty with whatever you bought today.” He handed her the second box. She opened it to find two large princess cut diamond earrings.

“I’m glad I bought new dress robes today, otherwise I don’t think I would be fit to escort you.” He smiled at her blush. “Why don’t you put your shoes on and let me get dressed, then we’ll go. I want to get there a little early to show you off.”

“Why didn’t you mention that tonight was such a large event?” She sat on the end of the bed to put her shoes on.

Sirius shrugged. “You would have argued with me about whether or not we would go at all. If Tonks told you I knew the pressure would be on to buy the right dress and treat yourself to the spa.”

Hermione made an indignant sound. “Think you know me so well?”

Sirius paused. “You did it, didn’t you?”

Hermione muttered something that sounded suspiciously like ‘arrogant arse.’

“What did you say?” There was a note of amusement in his voice.

“I didn’t.” Hermione tried to ignore his smug grin. She left the bedroom to wait for him in the living room. When he emerged, she caught her breath. His tuxedo like robes were perfectly fitted to his frame, his long hair was pulled back in a tight queue.

“I think we’ll be the couple to beat.” He spoke without a trace of modesty. “Ready to go?” Hermione nodded mutely, not trusting herself to speak. She was having trouble believing that this handsome wizard was really all hers.

Sirius walked them out into the backyard, he placed his arm around her waist. They disappeared with a soft ‘pop.’

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The Queen Maeve Theater was hidden in similar fashion to that of the Ministry of Magic or St. Mungo’s. It was located in a warehouse district, the heavy chains with locks on every door fell easily away with a simple ‘Alohamora.’

Once inside it was anything but a warehouse. Chandeliers twinkled from the high ceiling in the reception area, it was sumptuously decorated in dark purples lending an intimate feeling to the large room. There were only a few chairs which were all against the walls and clearly intended for elderly witches and wizards. The point of the room was to mill about and socialize before the show and during intermission. House elves scurried about with trays of horderves and wine.

When Sirius and Hermione entered the loud sound of a large group of people in the midst of conversation died away. Hermione froze, she hadn’t expected to make an entrance. She was hoping to slip in and quietly find Andromeda and Ted. She quickly scanned the room, looking for some explanation for why their arrival was clearly anticipated. Her eyes landed on Lyra Edgecombe who was currently and rather rudely, pointing in her direction.

“Are you alright?” Sirius paused, not caring what anyone else thought. His concern was solely for the witch beside him.

Hermione drew herself up, this was unexpected but not insurmountable. “Absolutely.”

Hermione walked proudly beside her wizard and looked around, all eyes were on her. Lyra hadn't done herself any favors and was wishing she had just kept her mouth shut. Hermione was the cynosure of the evening. She was stunning in her red dress and made a gorgeous couple with Sirius. Lyra, who had the attention of the room when she was gossiping about the child that Sirius had married was forgotten when he showed up with his elegant young wife.

Hermione looked around and saw Rita Skeeter looking in their direction. Hermione had to stifle a giggle when she saw what Rita was wearing. It was the tentacled sea monster dress in lime green, it was hideous. Rita Skeeter waltzed up to Sirius and Hermione with her camera man in tow. Sirius put his arm around Hermione's waist and posed them for the camera like he'd done this a thousand times before. He said a few printable words to Rita and then guided them over to some people Hermione knew.

Andromeda and Ted greeted them warmly and explained what Lyra had been up to. Sirius nodded and scowled in her direction. Andromeda recounted with pride how Hermione had put Lyra in her place.

“That's my girl!” Sirius looked down at his witch with love and pride. It didn't hurt that Hermione heard how he turned Lyra away, he would never have brought it up. He enjoyed knowing that Hermione had proof of his commitment and devotion to her. Being the wizarding world's most notorious playboy had been fun but those days were behind him now. He had something real and good with Hermione and had no intention of putting it in any sort of jeopardy.

Hermione told Andromeda, Ted and Sirius about her run in with Lyra's younger cousin during her fifth year. Marietta Edgecombe had betrayed the DA to Delores Umbridge which resulted in a face covered in pimples spelling out the word SNEAK. Hermione explained the spell she put on the parchment and was rewarded with looks of both surprise and pride.

"Let's just hope Lyra doesn't figure out which witch you are." Sirius was amused and pleased by this little piece of information. Hermione was clever and inventive and could handle her own. It gave him a little less to worry about.

Witches and wizards began to make passes by Sirius to offer their greeting and get an introduction to his wife. Ludo Bagman and his wife were among the first to make their way over. Ludo had a vague recollection of Hermione, Sirius offered that she was Harry Potter's best friend and Ludo snapped his fingers in recognition. The next to make their way over was Glenda Chittock, popular presenter of the WWN program, Witching Hour. She was a glamorous witch but a friendly one, she seemed to know Sirius pretty well. She offered Hermione a guest spot on her show, Hermione wasn't sure what to say to that. Sirius gently encouraged her, telling her it would be fun and before she knew it, she had agreed.

Hermione noted that Tonks had been entirely correct, there was a predominance of dresses in silver and green. Other House colors were mixed in as well but all of the attendees were from well known, wealthy pureblood families, regardless of House. She was surprised by the number of people who shared last names with known death eaters, who were themselves never known to be in that number. She realized that she was meeting their extended family.

She met Cliodna Lestrage, Sirius explained that she was the daughter of Rodolphus' brother Romulus. She offered her compliments to Hermione on her dress and invited her around for tea. Hermione thanked her graciously, intending never to find herself alone with that particular woman. She felt a little guilty, that maybe she was judging too harshly. She would hate for Sirius or Andromeda to be judged on their family associations.

If the witch or wizard wasn't from a wealthy, pureblood family the colors of dress robes and dresses were less predictable, many of them opting for flamboyant as opposed to House colors. Devlin Whitehorn, founder of the famous Nimbus racing broom company wore flashy silver robes accented with deep purple. He spoke very quickly and dashed off to meet more people.

She met Miranda Goshawk, an elderly witch with sharp eyes and an even sharper mind. Hermione couldn't help herself, she gushed over just how much she loved Goshawk's books. Sirius pulled her away with an indulgent smile.

Sirius paraded her around the room, proudly introducing her to proper wizarding society. There was clearly a bit of a boys club of whom he was definitely a member. They teased him good naturedly about having to take the wife home and not spending the rest of the night carousing and chasing witches. Hermione found that she was learning quite a bit about Sirius and for his part he was not embarrassed for her to see it. This was a part of who he was and he wanted her to know all of him.

The other thing she noticed was a collection of witches in their twenties and thirties who were obviously hunting for men. Whether it was husband hunting or just good time hunting, it was hard to tell. There was clearly a dress code and an etiquette that was followed here. The flirting happened within those strictures so none of it was tasteless or offensive. This was polite wizard society.

Lyra Edgecombe was stationed in the middle of this group of women, their self appointed leader for the evening. Her sour grapes made for good gossip and since this was the only attention she was receiving that night, she made the most of it.

The room buzzed with Hermione's name and the devotion with which her husband regarded her. This was practically her coming out party and she was having a wonderful time. Sirius wanted her to share in every aspect of his life, he was many things at once. This wasn't the sum of who he was but he did travel in this circle from time to time.

The lights flickered over head, indicating it was time to find your seat. Rather than stadium style seating, each family or group of people had a box. Sirius and Hermione would be sharing a box with Andromeda and Ted.

Hermione rather enjoyed the presentation, the orchestra were instruments charmed to play on their own. The dancing was rather like ballet except that the dancers literally danced on air, about a foot off the floor. The scenes would magically change when necessary. Hermione was delighted with show, she was having a wonderful night out with Sirius

Intermission lasted thirty minutes and was a time when groups got together to decide what to do after the show. Andromeda and Ted made a suggestion that they grab a bite to eat. Despite the fact that they were both quite hungry, they politely declined. They already had plans for after the show.

When the show was over they talked with Andromeda and Ted for a few minutes. Despite their clearly wizard garb they stopped at a muggle Indian restaurant for a bite before going home.

Sirius waited until he had the door closed behind him before pulling Hermione to him and claiming her lips as his own. He reached behind her and unzipped her dress and slid it off her body and onto the floor. He helped her to step out of it, they left where it lay as he picked her up and carried her to the bedroom.

“I hope you know you were the most beautiful witch in the room tonight. I was so proud to be on your arm.” He laid her gently on the bed and slid down beside her. He looked into her brown depths and released her hair from its confines. The stars disappeared as her hair cascaded down in large looping curls.

“I love you, baby.” Sirius was waiting for her to tell him that he needed to stop. Despite his earlier words he would never force her. He felt certain she wanted this too.

“I love you too, Sirius.” Hermione knew she wanted this. She had no uncertainty left. “I want to be with you.” She answered his unasked question. She knew he needed this reassurance to move forward.

Sirius kissed her briefly. He stood up and disrobed down to his boxer shorts and rejoined her on the bed. He slid up her body, starting with her legs, kissing his whole way up. He circled her belly button with his tongue and massaged her breasts. He licked and sucked along her neck and across her jaw. He stopped at her mouth.

“I don’t deserve you but I’m so glad you’re mine.” This moment was significant for him. She wasn’t his because the Ministry of Magic had passed a law, she was his because she wanted him. She was free to go her own way if she so desired. He felt cleansed by her choice. He knew that she forgave him despite the affect his careless mistake had on her life. He wanted to be a better man because of her.

“You have taken such good care of me, Sirius. Let’s leave the past where it belongs.” In her mind this was her first time but she wasn’t the frightened girl from so many months before. She was a young woman deeply in love with her man, ready to give herself, body, mind and soul.

Sirius had what he needed to move forward with her. He cupped her face gently with both hands and delivered a passionate kiss. His lips bruised hers but his fingers gently caressed the skin on her face. Hermione noted with wonder that his hands were trembling. She hadn’t expected her affect on him to be so strong. She let her hands explore his arms and ran her manicured nails down his chest. Sirius let a low whine of pleasure escape his lips.

Hermione sat up a little and reached around and released her bra. Sirius helped her out of it and flung it from him. Hermione lay back as he bent down to take a nipple in his mouth, flicking his tongue against it. Hermione sighed and pressed up against him, needing to feel all of him at once. She quit thinking and just let herself feel and react. This was right where she wanted to be, where she had wanted to be for weeks without really understanding it.

Sirius softly tickled her side with one hand, his other hand gently massaging her breast as he kissed and licked his way down her body. He got to her knickers and looped his fingers around the sides, Hermione watched him pull them off, there was something she was nervous about.

“Well, this is new.” He looked up at her with a grin. She let him part her legs so he could take a closer look. The salon witch had given her the magic equivalent of a bikini wax, the only thing she was left with was a ‘landing strip.’ Hermione sighed as Sirius tested out the new feel of her nearly bare pussy.

Sirius moved back up her body to whisper in her ear. “Not that I’m complaining. Its very sexy, Hermione.” He could sense she was a little nervous about her new look, never in her life had she considered such a thing. His hand gently explored her folds, she sighed and bucked her hips into his hand which brought a little growl of approval from Sirius.

“I don’t think its fair that I’m naked while you still have your boxers on.” Hermione pouted a little, anxious to see his glory.

Sirius instantly complied and shed his briefs, exposing his proud manhood to her gaze. She reached out to touch him with far more confidence than she had ever displayed before. She was remembering the morning she caught him in the bathroom, she was a quick learner and had an example to follow. She stroked him with far more knowledge of how to please him than ever before. He moaned at the touch, his head thrown back.

“Someone was paying attention.” He gently teased her, wondering just how long she had been standing there.

Hermione watched with wonder as he his face flushed, he thrust his hips gently into her hands which were both stroking him now. He wanted to be able to maintain his stamina, it wouldn’t hurt to get this first one out of the way. He really wanted to be pleasuring her but he wasn’t in a mood to argue.

“Teach me how to please you, Sirius. I know I used to know how.” She looked at him with her doe eyes, he opened his to look at her, considering her request. He really hadn’t ever taught her how to please him but there was just no sense in sharing that piece of information

Sirius took one of her hands and brought it to his mouth, he took her index finger and placed it in his mouth. He sucked on it gently, swirling his tongue around her finger tip, thrusting the finger in and out of his mouth. She paused lost in the sensation of his tongue, uncertain what he meant and then the light bulb went off. She smiled and slowly lowered her head to his cock. Sirius watched her intently, scarcely believing his innocent witch was about to engage in such a naughty act.

Hermione opened her mouth and swallowed the head, she sucked gently on it and swirled her tongue around. She further lowered her head, taking in as much as she could. She could hear Sirius moaning and panting but she didn’t let that distract her. She realized she wasn’t going to be able to fit the whole thing in her mouth, his cock was rather long. She brought her hands up and gripped the base while her mouth worked the other end.

Sirius moaned freely, Hermione looked over at him, he was breathing heavily, unable to tear his eyes away from her mouth. She tried to giggle but with her mouth full of cock it came off as more of a hum.

“Oh, Merlin! That’s so fucking good, baby.” Sirius praised her as he gently bucked into her mouth.

Hermione got a thrill knowing her efforts pleased him, it was a huge turn on to hear his sighs and moans, knowing it was her doing. She sucked and swirled her tongue, her head bobbing up and down on the shaft, humming the whole time. She stroked his cock with one hand while her other tenderly massaged his balls.

His breaths got shorter and shorter, a continuous flow of filth spilling from his mouth. Hermione could only imagine what he was feeling, she had yet to experience this herself. The experience created a

reaction in her body, her pussy was soaking and it was beginning to spread to her inner thighs.

Sirius tensed and cried out her name as he came, his eyes locked on her mouth. Hermione knew this about to happen, she had watched his essence shoot out of him that morning, she was prepared for this. She felt the warm liquid shoot into her mouth, it was slightly salty but not unpleasant. She sat back and Sirius watched as she swallowed. She completely floored him.

“Oh god, Hermione. If I didn’t know better I’d assume you had done that before.” She climbed on him and draped herself across his body, she couldn’t help looking up at him with a pleased grin.

Sirius allowed himself a moment to recover, letting his heart rate and breathing get back to normal. As soon as he had, she found herself flipped over, looking down at a southbound Sirius. He wanted to taste her now and wasn’t interested in the preamble. Hermione was surprised by his sudden burst of intensity and suddenly didn’t give a damn as his hot tongue made contact with her entrance. If it weren’t for his firm grip on her thighs, she would have bucked into the sensation.

Sirius groaned when he saw how wet she was, he licked her juices into his mouth, relishing the familiar taste that he had been missing. He had been fantasizing about this all evening, picturing her pussy laid open before him, his to do with as he pleased. He loved to hear her sigh and moan, each sweet sound sent a jolt of energy to his groin.

He tasted every part of her before settling on moist bud, Hermione cried out to him at the contact, her hands roamed in his hair. Sirius started off slowly, listening for changes in her breathing and whether she was sighing or moaning or cursing. He knew what her every reaction meant, knew exactly how to please her, how to shift her into a higher gear.

When he pressed a finger into her she called out to him again, he added another and then another. He thrust his fingers into her rhythmically over and over and over again. He sucked gently on her

nub as he thrust his fingers faster and faster. When she started swearing he knew she was close, he thrust ever harder and felt the walls of her pussy begin to twitch. He increased the suction on her clit and felt her sleeve flutter and then clamp down on his fingers as her orgasm hit.

Hermione was not prepared for her orgasm, nothing in life had prepared her for the mix of sensation and frustration that led up to it. She pleaded with him not to stop, not to ever stop, she started out with a soft voice and was shouting by the time she came. A look of pleased surprise was frozen on her face as the intense, heated sensation shot through her.

Now it was his turn to grin at her, smug and rather pleased with himself. He could be as smug as he liked for all she cared, he'd earned it.

Sirius slid up her body and covered her mouth with his, she could taste herself on his lips and found it arousing. Sirius let her recover before he began to work her up again. She had never experienced anything so wonderful and yet she had a feeling something was missing, she ached for something.

The more he touched and kissed her, the stronger the ache became, she needed something, needed it badly. Finally she put words to her need.

“Please, Sirius...”

He complied, tonight was not the night for teasing, for holding himself out of reach. Tonight was about finding each other once again, finding that missing piece, completing each other.

He pressed himself into her, they both moaned their approval, her hips rose to meet his thrust.

“God, it's good to be back inside of you, baby.”

Everything made sense, this was what she had been pining for.

“Oh, Sirius...I missed you too.” She hadn’t understood that truth until this moment. He was surprised by her confession but also pleased that something of them had remained in her.

Sirius took her with slow strokes, just enjoying being back inside her. Her velvet depth welcomed him, they sighed and moaned with every stroke. They found a familiar rhythm and like every other physical expression of their love, she knew she had done this before, done this with him and him alone.

The flew together, higher and higher, calling tenderly out to each other, lost to the sensation. They increased their pace, seeking their release together.

“More, Sirius. I need more...”

He lifted her by the hips and slammed into her harder and harder, giving her what he knew she needed. Every muscle in his body was tensed and flexed, he looked like a god to her. All her nerves were strung tight, the tension in her body was at its height. Just when she didn't think she could stand the sweet frustration another second her dam broke, pulling him over with her, calling out to each other.

They collapsed together, sated, as they caught their breath, their bodies slowing back to normal.

Sirius and Hermione lay entwined together, gently caressing and stroking each other, basking in the after glow of their love making. They whispered endearments and confessions of love and were gently tugged into deep, contented sleep.

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A/N: Thank you for the reviews!

Special thanks to Tasseer1

I was able to post so quickly because this started out as one chapter. It quickly became obvious that I was going to have to split it up into two parts.

Sorry for the length of this chapter. Couldn't be helped. I tried to keep it to a regular length but it just wasn't happening.

Please review!

Attention

NC17

Hermione smiled sleepily and pressed her back into Sirius' hard body. His arms held her body possessively close around her middle. She wiggled her bottom against his groin suggestively, stimulating his morning hard cock. She heard him moan sleepily as he slowly woke up. He yawned and stretched widely before bringing his arms back around her body, tugging her close.

"Good morning, sleep well?" His lips nibbled at her neck.

"Mmmm." She had enjoyed herself the night before and was hoping for a repeat performance. She ground her bottom into his groin once more, hoping he'd get the hint.

"Minx."

He did.

Sirius wrapped an arm around her chest, his hand lighting on her breast, his fingers playing with her nipple. His other arm wrapped around her hips, his hand on her bare pussy, stroking the skin there, enjoying the new feel.

She felt him enter from behind in their spooned position, Hermione sighed her pleasure. His arms tightened around her, holding her in place as thrust into her. His pace was unhurried, his lips caressed her neck and whispered tenderness in her ear.

Hermione was enveloped in him, loving the feel of him all around her. Still too sleepy for vigorous sex, he kept his pace slow, reaching deep within her heat. His fingers found her sensitive nub, he gently rubbed her, without intensity, simply enjoying the feel of their union.

The tension in her body was building slowly, coiling gently in her belly. Sirius nibbled along her neck, all the while telling her how beautiful

she was, how much he loved her. His low voice rumbled in his chest sending vibrations through her body.

“Siriusss...”

Small jolts of pleasure shot through her as he increased his pace by increments, they were in no hurry this morning. Her low moaning excited him, he thrust a little faster, his speech becoming coarser. He told her how good she felt, how much he enjoyed making love to her.

Hermione was aware of nothing, only Sirius was real to her, only this man who set her mind and body on fire. Every nerve in her body sung his praises as ripples of heated pleasure began to mount and subside only to mount higher. The energy in her body was building, building, building as he slowly brought her to the very edge and let her look but not leap. He held her body on the precipice, her rough keening moan testing his resolve.

Finally, he released her, she lost muscle control as she broke, a flood of warmth flowing out of her as molten lava moved across her body in deep waves, one after another, after another. She cried out her love to him as she came. He was no match for her, she brought him over the edge, howling her name. Her body quivered in his arms, her breathing labored, heart racing.

Their bodies relaxed back into each other, she turned so that she faced him, their lips meeting for the first time that morning. Arms caressed tenderly as they slowed down, the warmth from their love making holding them close.

“That was...” She wasn’t sure how to describe it.

“You are an amazing woman, Hermione. What you do to me...” Sirius gazed at her in admiration and awe. He had known a lot of women in his life but none compared to her, none came close to touching her.

“I love you, Sirius.”

“And I love you, baby.”

They held each other quietly, sharing unhurried, sensual kisses, softly touching each other. They dozed lightly in each others arms.

Sirius was the first to stir, his stomach complaining loudly. She had fallen back to sleep so he got up to make them breakfast. He threw on a pair of sweatpants and left the bedroom, quietly closing the door behind him.

Sirius looked out into his living room and startled. Remus, Harry and Ron were sitting around talking quietly.

“To what do I owe the pleasure?” Sirius was surprised to have company.

“Did you forget?” Remus had an odd, amused expression on his face.

“Apparently.” Sirius walked into the family room looking puzzled.

“We’re staying the weekend, remember?” Harry looked a little hurt that he had been forgotten.

“I’m sorry Harry, of course. Things have been, well...there’s been some developments around here.” Sirius chose his wording carefully.

“Yes, we’ve been listening to those developments for the last half hour.” Remus’ amused expression broke down into a chuckle. “By the way, you’ve got owls.”

“At least we didn’t have to see it this time.” Ron flushed at Remus’ confession.

“Oh, uh...sorry?” Sirius wasn’t sure what to say, it was his house after all. If he wanted to have loud sex with his wife he damn well would.

“You’re familiar with Silencing Charms, yes?” Remus was enjoying this.

“We live alone, Moony.” Sirius could see the humor in the situation although it was doubtful that the boys did.

“Where’s Hermione?” Harry made an attempt at changing the subject.

“She’s, uh...asleep.”

Remus chuckled.

“Asleep! We just heard...” Harry thumped Ron. Ron glared at Harry.

“Are you hungry? I was just about to make breakfast.” Sirius was interested in getting off the topic.

The boys chorused in the affirmative.

“So, what shall we have?” Sirius rubbed his hands together excitedly. “Eggs, sausage, toast...how does that sound?”

He got ‘please’ and ‘thank you’ from Harry and Ron. Remus followed Sirius into the kitchen, the boys settled themselves around Sirius’ chess set.

“So, the nudge was a success, good for you, good for both of you.” Remus settled himself on a bar stool.

Sirius grinned at Remus, unable to hide his happiness and not willing to try. He walked over to the kitchen window and let in six owls.

“Popular.” Remus casually commented on the amount of correspondence.

“Looks that way, doesn’t it?” Sirius had to admit, he was surprised. “Let’s see...Hermione Black, Mrs. Sirius Black, Hermione Black,

Hermione Granger Black, Hermione Black and the Prophet.” Sirius looked at Remus, stunned. He pushed the scrolls toward Remus

“Let me see...who are they from...” Remus’ eyes instantly went up in surprise. “What the...this one is from the Daughters of the International Warlock Convention. What in Merlin’s name are they doing writing to her?”

“ That is odd.” Sirius frowned. “This one is from Cliona Lestrage...probably confirming her invitation.”

“Clio? Really?” Remus glanced at Sirius’ face for reaction. Sirius’ forehead was furrowed, his hand rubbed at his jaw. “So how was your date, did she have fun?” Remus picked up another scroll.

“ Yeah, you should have seen how beautiful she was.” Sirius’ expression softened, he glanced at Remus who was looking at him bemusedly. Sirius turned his head away to hide his flushed face.

Remus was too happy for Sirius to take the shot, he simply picked up another scroll and read aloud who sent it. “This one is from WWN. Sirius, what happened last night?”

“I just introduced her around, she made a bit of a splash to be honest.” Sirius turned his attention to breakfast and let Remus read to him.

“How much of a splash did she make?” Remus looked at another scroll. “This one is from the Prophet.”

Sirius raised an eyebrow. “Unless Rita is prepared to kiss Hermione’s arse that is never going to happen and even then it still might not happen.”

Remus chuckled, he had heard Hermione rant about Rita more than once. “This one is from Witch Weekly.”

Sirius laughed, "I've got quite the popular witch." He walked into the family room. "Breakfast!" The boys scrambled to their feet as Sirius turned to the bedroom. He opened the door and then closed it behind him.

Hermione was stretching and waking, she smiled as he entered the room.

"Nice nap?"

"Mmmm."

"We've got company." He sat down on the bed beside her.

Hermione looked puzzled for a moment. "Oh! Harry and Ron!"

"I made breakfast so whenever you're ready, you've got friends waiting." He leaned over to kiss her forehead.

"I think I'll shower first." Sirius nodded and got up.

When he got to the door he paused and turned. "This morning was wonderful."

Hermione smiled, blushed and scampered into the bathroom.

Sirius left the bedroom and returned to the kitchen.

"I almost forgot. Dora told me about Hermione and Lyra." Remus was grinning from ear to ear.

"Who's Lyra?" Harry looked between Remus and Sirius.

"Sirius' ex girlfriend." Remus wore a sly grin.

"That's over stating it, don't you think?" Sirius frowned at Remus.

"Alright, how about..." Sirius cut him off.

“Do we really need to clarify it?” Sirius rolled his eyes at Remus who was laughing openly.

Harry looked at Sirius with a raised eyebrow and the barest hint of a smirk. Everyone knew about Sirius’ reputation. “So, what happened between your wife and your ex girlfriend?” As soon as the words were out of his mouth Harry snickered. “Just how bad did Lyra come off?”

“According to Dora, Hermione really put her in her place.” Remus filled his plate.

“What did I do? I heard my name.” Hermione walked into the kitchen, showered and dressed, her hair still wet.

“We were just hearing about Lyra.” Sirius shot a warning look at Ron.

“Oh, her” Hermione screwed her face into a scowl.

“So what happened?” Harry ignored Sirius.

“She walked in, complaining about getting brushed off. Turns out it was Sirius who brushed her off, she insulted him...I defended him.” She smiled shyly at Sirius.

“Overly simplistic.” Remus pointed out her omission.

Hermione sighed. “She insinuated that Sirius was going to cheat on me. I told her I wasn’t worried considering he had just turned her down.”

Sirius walked up behind her and put his arms around her and whispered in her ear. “Thank you for the vote of confidence. It means a great deal to me.”

Harry cleared his throat. Sirius shot him a dark look.

Harry smiled. Sirius relaxed.

Hermione patted Sirius on the arm and stepped toward the food. "I'm starving, I seem to have worked up an appetite."

Ron choked on his coffee. Hermione gave Ron an odd expression, she wasn't being purposefully crude and didn't know the whole house had heard their love making.

"You've got a ton of mail and we're dying to know what it's about." Remus pushed the scrolls to her when she sat down.

"Really? All this is for me?" Hermione picked up a scroll with a wax seal. She broke the seal and read the letter.

"Hmmm...I've been invited to attend a meeting of some club." Hermione drew a piece of bacon to her mouth but paused at Remus and Sirius' look of shock. "What?"

"You've been invited to a meeting of the Daughters?" There was an odd tone in Sirius' voice.

She looked at the letter again. "Apparently." She handed it over to Sirius.

He took the letter and read it and then handed it to Remus.

"What's the big deal?" Harry looked between Sirius and Remus.

"Well, it's just...I mean...not that we agree with their policy or anything but it's an organization that is fairly exclusive. To be a member you have to prove your pureblood status back to the International Warlock Convention of 1289." Remus looked very puzzled. "I mean you're muggleborn, they've never let in a muggleborn before."

"Why would I want to join their club? They'd all hate me." Hermione shrugged her shoulders.

“Would they have made a mistake in sending Hermione the letter?” Harry pointed to a reasonable possibility.

“Rather unlikely. They are very selective even beyond just that. Lyra’s been trying to join for the last five years. She can prove her status but she’s not the sort of girl they let in.” Sirius suddenly let loose a bark of laughter. “If they were to let you in by some miracle that would just kill her!”

Hermione grinned, anything that would irritate Lyra was wonderful in her book.

“So if this is a legitimate offer, Hermione would be the first muggleborn to join?” Ron spoke with his mouth full.

“Yeah, first ever.” Remus paused for a moment, concentrating on something. “You should join.”

“That’s ridiculous.” She picked up another scroll and opened it.

“No, it’s not. What did we fight for, Hermione, if not this?” Harry’s tone was slightly harsh, he was a little surprised at her.

“We fought so I could join some silly society ladies club?” Hermione looked at Harry with a raised eyebrow.

“No, we fought so that muggleborns would be treated the same as purebloods.” Ron picked up the beat and joined in with Harry.

“What? So I can be their token muggleborn, so they can prove how progressive they are? I’m not some sell out.” Hermione shook her head and read the letter in her hand.

“You are a living, breathing example of the viciousness of the pureblood ideal. First you had to marry to avoid Azkaban, then you almost died in the name of blood purity. Who better than you to lead the way for real social change?” Sirius was looking at her with real

admiration, he knew what her choice would be and it made him love her all the more.

Hermione bit her lip to hide a little grin. Sirius made a strong point and now she knew she had his support. She didn't answer them right away. "This is from Glenda Chittock's office, they've given me a list of possible dates."

"Dates for what?" Harry stood up and took his plate to the sink.

"Glenda offered Hermione a guest spot on her program, Witching Hour." Sirius was so proud of his wife and it carried in his tone.

"Wow! Mum loves that program!" Ron looked at her like she was some sort of celebrity.

"A star is born!" Remus teased Hermione a little, now even more curious as to what was in the other letters. He unrolled the Daily Prophet and looked in the society pages, he had his suspicions.

"I thought she was just being nice." Hermione was excited and nervous at the prospect of being heard nationally.

"Not Glenda, she's a really genuine person." Sirius thought all of this attention would do Hermione good. She seemed to not know how special she was.

Hermione unrolled another letter. "How do I politely say 'No, thank you. I'm terrified at the thought of being alone with you.'"

Sirius looked over her shoulder. "Clio is alright. She's a little like me and 'Dromeda, she's a bit more elitist than us but still a nice person. You should go, especially if you're serious about joining the Daughters."

"I haven't made up my mind." Hermione wondered if she were lying. She conjured parchment, a quill and a pot of ink. She penned a response to Cliona Lestranger and set it aside. If Cliona were harmless it would be rude not to go.

Sirius handed her the letter from Witch Weekly, he wanted to save Rita's letter for the last.

"Ha!" Remus made them all jump. He spread out the prophet and pointed his finger to the front page of the society section. There in all their splendor were Hermione and Sirius. Sirius was smiling confidently into the camera while Hermione tried to look demurely away. He read aloud from the article.

'Sirius Black and his lovely bride Hermione Granger Black made the social scene at last night's Queen Maeve gala. Hermione is a relative unknown to the social elite but that didn't stop her from being adored by one and all. It is rumored that this lovely young woman was even noticed by the Daughter's of the International Warlock Convention, a particularly remarkable feat for the young muggleborn witch. Of course, any woman capable of taming the notorious Sirius Black would be noteworthy. Hermione is known to be best friend to Harry Potter and played a pivotal role in the war against Voldemort. Keep a sharp eye on this rising young star.'

"Why do they always find a way to interject my name into everything?" Harry huffed lightly, overly tired of seeing his name in the Prophet.

Hermione was sporting a lovely blush, she giggled softly and looked away.

"Well, well, well...This does explain a few things." Sirius was grinning from ear to ear.

"Hard to believe that Rita wrote that article." Remus looked thoughtful once more. "That must be the Daughter's doing."

Hermione shook her head, she was starting to feel a bit giddy. She unrolled the letter from Witch Weekly and laughed nervously. "It just gets stranger and stranger."

"What does?" Ron tried to read over her shoulder.

“They want to do an interview with me.” Hermione looked flabbergasted.

Sirius laughed. “You’re almost as famous as me and Harry, baby!”

“You know...you should tell your story. How you had to get married and then were cursed. You shouldn’t let them forget what they did to you Hermione.” Harry was being completely serious.

“That’s not a bad idea. If the Daughters are still serious about you joining after the article has run then it helps set your agenda.” Remus looked at Hermione with a thoughtful expression.

“My agenda?” Hermione sounded perplexed.

“The Daughters are pretty powerful, you’ll be in a unique position to do a lot of good. If you are open about equality and fair treatment for muggleborns and purebloods alike from the beginning you could get some remarkable things accomplished.” Sirius was so proud to be her husband, he marveled at the affect she could have on their world.

“Yeah, Hermione! Like spew only for muggleborns.” Ron was nodding his head in agreement with Sirius.

“It’s not spew, it’s S.P.E.W.!”

Harry and Ron grinned at each other. Hermione rolled her eyes. Ron loved to give her a hard time about S.P.E.W. Sirius pushed the last letter over to her, she unfurled it. Her expression darkened as she read it.

“Well, if she thinks I’m just going to let bygones be bygones she’s got another thing coming.” She tossed the letter down.

“It’s a little more publicity, sweetheart. One more venue to be heard from. If you are serious about the Daughters you should consider doing the interview.” Sirius lay his hand over hers and gave it a squeeze.

“I haven’t made up my mind.” She weakly protested his assumption.

“I know better.” Sirius smiled at her, his head cocked to one side.

“Yes, alright. It is a good opportunity.” Hermione caved as she knew she would.

“That’s my little protester!” She slapped Sirius playfully on the arm. He put his arm around her and kissed her temple.

“I don’t know anything about the Daughter’s. I’m going to have to buy some books to do a little reading up on them.” Hermione chewed on the end of her quill.

“No problem there, I’m sure Flourish and Blott’s has a wonderful selection of books on the Daughter’s.” Sirius was more than happy to buy her a treasury of books on the subject.

“You should also get some books on wizard etiquette.” Remus offered his suggestion.

“This is going to take a ton of research and I still have my NEWTs to study for.” Hermione felt a wave of relief, she was glad she had something to concentrate on.

“Hermione...why is your necklace glowing.” Ron leaned in closer to take a better look at the necklace Sirius gave her.

“My what is what?” Hermione sat up in surprise.

“Yeah, it is glowing.” Harry squinted at her neck.

Remus and Sirius looked at each other in alarm. Sirius jumped out of his chair and scooped Hermione into his arms.

“I’ll stay with the boys.” Sirius nodded curtly at Remus.

“Sirius put me down, what’s going on?” Hermione struggled weakly against his strong arms.

Remus rushed along beside Sirius to the fireplace, he threw some powder in.

“St. Mungo’s” Sirius stepped holding Hermione tightly to him. They disappeared in swirl of green flames.

[illegible]

A/N: Thank you for the reviews!

I'm glad you all liked the last chapter. I was considering wrapping this up in the next few chapters but I've discovered a new direction to go in.

Thank you Tasseer1 for the eye opening review.

Please review!

Remember

Sirius marched through the reception area at St. Mungo's, past the Welcome Witch and made straight for the stairs bumping people out of his way as he went. Hermione was still trying to struggle against him and was complaining loudly.

“Sirius! Watch out! You can't just push people aside!” Hermione wrestled vainly with his arms.

Sirius just glanced at her as he heroically took the stairs with her in his arms, saying nothing. All he could think about was that one more horrible thing was happening to her. He couldn't stand the thought of losing her again, it almost killed him the last time.

“Sirius, I am fine! Why are you doing this?” Hermione finally gave up and relaxed in his arms.

Sirius burst into the fourth floor and looked around for Healer Stromwell. He shifted Hermione in his arms and strode toward a healer in lime green robes who was checking a chart on a patient's door.

“Where's Healer Stromwell?” The expression on his face startled the young healer he was speaking to.

“Just a moment.” She turned on her heel, quickly, in search of Stromwell.

“Sirius, we're here, can you put me down now? This is getting silly. Look at me...I'm just fine.” Hermione pleaded her case, attempting to reason with him.

“Something is hurting you Hermione, that's why the necklace is glowing, it's protecting you from something.” Sirius was sweating the minutes it was taking for the young healer to return with Stromwell.

“Well, that’s not terrific news, I’ll admit...” Hermione forced herself to remain calm. “But it looks like the necklace is doing its job, so why don’t you put me down.”

Sirius looked her over, as if he could spot the damage. He had to admit that she was right so he reluctantly set her down. He pulled Hermione against his body, not willing to let her go very far. She sighed resignedly, understanding his over protective behavior. She leaned her head against his chest. She wondered if there was a curse on one of the letters, maybe the one from Lestrage. Hermione heard a familiar voice and turned around, her face broke into a smile when she saw Professor Dumbledore.

“Professor! How are you?” Hermione would have stepped toward him but Sirius’ arms held her in place. “Sirius! Cut it out!”

“Mrs. Black, what a distinct pleasure! I was just reading about you this morning. What brings you here? Is everything right with you?” Dumbledore walked over to Sirius and Hermione, noting Sirius’ anxious demeanor.

“Something is wrong, we just don’t know what. Are you well, Professor?” Hermione was more concerned for the Headmaster than she was for herself.

“Right as rain, as the muggles say. They just wanted to check up on me, so here I am.” He smiled warmly at Hermione. “So, something is wrong you say? Ah, I see...your necklace, a rare find, very powerful.”

“What does it do? Sirius never said.” Sirius wasn’t paying attention to the conversation, he had his sights trained on the door the young healer had left through. He turned his head toward his companions upon hearing his name.

“What?” He paused and put his finger up, he had just seen Stromwell. He motioned to her and she began to move in their direction. He turned back to Dumbledore and Hermione.

“Your wife was asking what the charm at her neck did.” Dumbledore moved out of the way, a healer was walking by with a patient. The patient’s head was sprouting tentacles that inched their way menacingly toward the healer.

“Did I not tell you?” Hermione shook her head.

“Oh, it wards against physical harm from spell damage. Only a few were ever made, this one has been sitting in Gildingham’s for years.” Sirius turned back to his guard duty. Stromwell had paused to speak to a healer.

“Mrs. Black, what were you doing before the necklace started to glow.” Dumbledore wondered if the answer might be simple or obvious.

“Reading post and eating breakfast.” Hermione turned at the sound of screaming, the healer who had just passed by was under attack from the tentacles. The wizard with the tentacles was struggling to help him.

“ Really...post from whom?” Dumbledore watched as Healer Stromwell rushed to the aid of her staff, prying tentacles off his face.

“ Let’s see...from the Daughter’s of the International Warlock Convention, Witch Weekly, Glenda Chittock, Clidna Lestrangle and Rita Skeeter.” Hermione ticked off who had sent her post on her hand.

“ Well, none of those are likely suspects. Unusual that the Daughter’s would contact a muggleborn but not sinister in respect to this.” He raised his wand. “May I?”

Hermione glanced at Sirius, who was looking in the other direction and nodded. Dumbledore drew complicated patterns in the air, a shimmer surrounded Hermione. Sirius was distracted from glaring at Stromwell to pay attention to what was happening to her. He watched Dumbledore’s face for a reaction. Healer Stromwell finally made it over to Hermione, she paused to wait for Dumbledore to finish.

“Changing professions, Albus?” She chided him for examining one of her patients.

“No, Hesper. Just trying to help a former student while she waited.” He let her know she had taken too long in his opinion. “I think you are going to want to call Severus in and if I may suggest, give Mrs. Black a complete examination.”

“Do you detect something wrong with the Toujours Pur curse?” Alarm was evident in her voice, she had seen Hermione conversing with Dumbledore and had assumed there was nothing urgent. She was committed to all her patients and wouldn’t forgive herself if her delay cost Hermione precious minutes.

“I do not believe that Mrs. Black is in any immediate danger however you are the Healer, I will let you be the judge.” Dumbledore gestured from Stromwell to Hermione.

“Come with me, Mrs. Black.” Healer Stromwell lead Hermione to an examination room. She spoke to her staff, asking them to summon Snape before following Hermione into the exam room and closing the door.

“So tell me, Hermione. How are the migraines and the seizures? They should almost be gone by now.” Healer Stromwell pulled a few implements out of drawers and cabinets and set them all on a side table.

“I haven’t had a migraine in over two weeks and its been a week and a half since my last seizure.” Hermione looked around the dingy little room and wrinkled her nose in distaste.

“That’s about what I expected. Now if you will sit on the end of the exam table we can begin.” The healer patted the end of the table.

Hermione sat on the end of the little exam table and waited patiently for Healer Stromwell to begin. Stromwell stuck the point of her wand in Hermione’s ear and took her temperature. She flicked her wand at

a form, recording it. Stromwell put her arm in a funny little cuff with a gage attached. Hermione asked what it was for.

“Blood pressure.” The cuff took seconds to return an answer which was also recorded.

The exam proceeded as one magical medical artifact after another was used to get Hermione’s vital statistics. Her ears and nostrils were examined as was her mouth. Her heartbeat and breathing were monitored and then came the pelvic examination. Hermione always dreaded it when her mother took her to the gynecologist, she wondered if magic would make it less awkward.

Healer Stromwell asked Hermione to change into a gown and then left the room. She disrobed and put the gown on, now dreading that the exam wouldn’t be that much different. There was a brief knock on the door, the healer returned with a potion. She asked Hermione to lie back on the table and relax.

Healer Stromwell pushed the gown up and felt around Hermione’s abdomen. She shied away from the cold hands because they tickled her. Then the healer poured a small amount of thick liquid over the spot where her uterus would be. She watched the changing colors of the potion, her eyebrows went up in surprise.

“My, my...we did catch this early.” Healer Stromwell cleaned the potion off of Hermione’s abdomen.

“Caught what early?” Hermione held her breath.

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“Enough with the vague, Albus. What did you detect?” Sirius was feeling dangerous, he was in no mood for Dumbledore’s half answers.

“I believe the barriers that Severus erected in Hermione’s brain are becoming unstable.” Sirius thought Dumbledore didn’t look half as concerned as he ought to.

“And? What else? I know there’s more, there’s always more with you.” Sirius didn’t have the patience to mince his words.

“I believe that the barriers are unstable because they are no longer containing the curse.” Dumbledore’s explanation was delivered very calmly, as though he hadn’t just said that Hermione’s life was in danger.

“WHAT!” Sirius charged toward the exam room Hermione had entered. Dumbledore calmly followed with a little smile on his face.

Sirius unceremoniously threw the door open to rush to his wife’s side, the wife who had just returned to him. What he saw pulled him up short. Hermione was in a half sitting up, half laying down position on the exam table. She looked ecstatic, surprised and scared all at the same time. One hand covered her mouth, the other her stomach. She startled when Sirius entered the room. She looked at him cautiously, like she had something to say but wasn’t sure how it would be received. Healer Stromwell excused herself and closed the door quietly behind her. Hermione’s unsure mien gave Sirius pause, she didn’t have the look of looming tragedy, for which he was very grateful. He walked closer to her, trying to decipher her uncertainty.

“Sirius, I have something to tell you.” She gestured to a chair, indicating the he should sit down. He sat, preparing himself mentally for the worst. “I’m not sure how you’re going to feel about this, I don’t know if we ever talked about it.” Hermione hopped off the table and paced back and forth in front of him as she spoke.

“Talked about what, baby?” He really wished she would skip the preamble and just tell him what was wrong.

She sighed, preparing herself for a bad reaction. Hermione paused in her pacing to stand in front of him. “I’m pregnant.” She braced for him to receive the news poorly.

Sirius wasn’t sure if he had heard her right, she had spoken so quietly. He asked her to repeat herself.

“I’m pregnant, Sirius. We forgot all about birth control last night and this morning.”

Sirius’ face slackened into a look of innocent wonder, the way a very young boy might look at the tree full of presents on Christmas morning. His gaze slid from her eyes to her belly and then back up to her face. He slowly recovered, a huge smile breaking out across his face. He pulled her into his lap and circled his arms around her, hugging her close.

“Really?”

She leaned into his chest, resting her head there. “I wasn’t sure how you would take the news.”

Sirius had always wanted a family but the last few years of his life had him convinced it would never happen. He almost didn’t believe that it was true, that he would even be allowed. His heart nearly burst at the thought; sometime in the very near future he would be a father. He placed his hand over her belly, picturing her swelling with his child, their child. He buried his head in her hair and sighed.

“I’ve never been happier, Hermione. How far along are you?” He couldn’t wait to tell everyone, he wanted to share his happiness with the world.

“Healer Stromwell says it happened in the last few hours.” She thought of their love making that morning and blushed.

“This morning, then?” He noticed the blush and nuzzled her neck affectionately.

“We’re going to be parents, Sirius. Are we ready for this?” Hermione thought she would at least have her NEWTs out of the way, it was all happening a little fast for her.

“We did talk about this once. We looked forward to being parents.” Sirius kissed her temple and gave her a squeeze of reassurance. “I think it’s natural to be nervous.”

“I know it is. I’ve always wanted a family.” She paused thoughtfully and smiled at him. “I think you will be a wonderful father, I really do.” She raised her eyes to his.

“You’re going to be the best mum ever!” He said it with such joy and conviction that she had to laugh, his enthusiasm was infectious. She started to feel her doubt slide away. “Come on, then. Get dressed, we still have to figure out why the necklace is glowing.”

Hermione slid the gown over her head and shied out of reach of his hands. She quickly got dressed, suddenly worried that he might want to baptize the exam table. Hermione folded up the gown and lay it on the table and crawled back onto Sirius’ lap to wait for Healer Stromwell. There was a knock at the door, they chorused ‘come in.’ Snape glided through the door, his eyes falling on Hermione and Sirius. He was followed in by Healer Stromwell who closed the door behind her.

“Why is the barrier unstable?” Sirius took on an almost accusing tone.

“What?” Hermione was clearly alarmed. “Why didn’t you say something, Sirius?” He looked at her apologetically, he’d suddenly had other things on his mind.

“I won’t know that until I examine her, Black.” Snape’s lip curled in a sneer. He asked Hermione to return to the exam table. Healer Stromwell picked up the used gown to make room for her. Hermione climbed back onto the table and lay back. He performed a few movements of his wand around her head, muttering spells under his breath.

“Impossible!” Snape took a few steps back, a look of shock and disbelief on his face.

“What?” Hermione and Sirius spoke in unison.

There was a knock at the door. Healer Stromwell cracked the door to see who it was. Dumbledore was asking if he could come in. She turned to Hermione and Sirius, who were still reacting to Snape's outburst, to get their permission. They were anxious for all the help they could get and agreed. Dumbledore walked in and smiled at Hermione and Sirius.

"Well?" Sirius snapped at Snape. "What's impossible?"

Snape recovered from his shock and drew himself up. "I cannot explain how this happened but the Toujours Pur curse is no longer present in Hermione's brain."

A pleased look of surprise crossed both Sirius and Hermione's faces.

"Severus, if I may?" Dumbledore politely asked for the floor, Snape nodded to him.

"I believe that there are congratulations in order, yes?" Dumbledore smiled warmly at Hermione who nodded. She wondered how he knew and then remembered that he had performed some sort of spell on her. "You see Severus, Hermione is expecting." He got nothing but confused looks so he proceeded to explain. "That curse had but one goal, the prevention of mixed blood in the Black line. That ultimate goal has failed, thus breaking the curse's power over her."

"Then, why I am in danger?" Hermione still looked worried and confused.

"With nothing to contain, the barrier has become unstable." Snape still looked a little shocked.

Healer Stromwell looked between Dumbledore and Snape. "Can you remove it?"

"Certainly." Snape was beginning to look sour, he had rather enjoyed Sirius' pain.

“Does that mean I will have my memory back?” Hermione’s voice was tentative but hopeful.

Sirius held his breath, hoping that this wasn’t just a dream.

“Yes. It also means no more migraines and seizures.” Healer Stromwell smiled at the couple, thrilled that their nightmare might soon be over.

“Well...what are you waiting for?” Sirius was anxious to have Hermione returned to him, whole and well once again.

Hermione trembled with excitement, this period of uncertainty and confusion was about to be over. Snape muttered his spell under his breath, moving his wand in complex patterns over head which now had a faint purple glow about it. Hermione slowly became aware of exactly where in her brain the barriers were erected, she could practically touch them with her mind. One by one she felt them dissolve as areas of her mind were freed once again. The largest of these barriers was still intact, Snape was working through the smaller ones first. He paused in his work to speak to her.

“Have you been aware of the barriers as I’ve removed them?” Snape walked around so that she could see his face.

“Yes.” It was comforting to know that it was normal to be so aware of them. She vaguely recollected knowing where they were when they were first put in. That was several weeks ago, it had been awhile since she felt them.

“It is likely you will feel a bit disoriented after I remove the last one. Your memory will return immediately which may come as a bit of a shock.” He returned to his position behind her.

Hermione kept her mind trained on the spot he was working on, she wanted to rush in and remember. She was tired of having to rebuild her life around this blank spot in her mind. Some extremely important things had taken place in those blank spaces and she wanted them back. She wanted to remember falling in love with Sirius and the last

battle. Hearing about it or feeling an echo of it just wasn't good enough for her. Even seeing it in a pensieve was a paltry excuse for the real thing.

Just as had happened before, the barrier became more and more palpable to her and then she was aware of it breaking down. She held her breath as the last of it melted away, she plowed forward. Her mind flooded with images once lost; Harry's arrival at number twelve, Grimmauld Place, the awkward conversation with Sirius, her first night with him, the long weekend she spent at number twelve, Grimmauld Place, the attack in Hogsmeade, escaping with Sirius, Mexico, nearly dying at Bellatrix' hand, getting caught in the hallway, the moment they knew would be parents together, Christmas Day, receiving the ring, Sirius at her bedside in the hospital and everything in between. She let her breath out.

Sirius watched with anticipation, trembling, she wasn't saying anything. She seemed to be absorbed in thought, her brow knit in concentration. And then she breathed. She opened her eyes to look over at him, their eyes met and he knew.

She was back.

Hermione struggled to sit up, Sirius stepped forward and helped her. She had a bit of a headache and wanted to go home. She'd had her fill of hospitals for quite some time. She looked at Sirius, wanting to feel his arms around her. He immediately knew what she needed, he needed it too. Strong arms surrounded her and she sighed, all was right in her world.

"I want to go home."

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Hermione and then Sirius stepped through the fireplace at number twenty four, Eternal Springs. Remus, Harry and Ron rushed over to greet them. Remus knew that he would find out everything in just a moment, he quietly waited, relieved that Hermione had returned with Sirius. Harry and Ron were less patient, they had a million questions and were asking them all, very hurriedly, all at once. Hermione raised

her hand to rub her temples. She smiled weakly at the boys, appreciating their concern but wishing they would just shut up.

“Back off!” Sirius growled at the two teenagers giving them each a dark glare.

Harry and Ron were surprised and chastised by Sirius’ aggression. They smiled their apology to Hermione, both of them looking a bit sheepish.

Hermione patted him on the chest, quietly admonishing him for being so abrupt. They were just concerned for her even if they were a bit over enthusiastic about it. She smiled at all three of them and took a seat on one of her couches. They all took their cue from her and sat, waiting to hear if she was alright or not. She and Sirius exchanged a glance. The look they shared assured him that she was alright and that she would like him to share their news.

“We have great news!” His face broke out into a huge smile. He turned his head to look at Remus specifically. “We’re expecting!”

Remus swallowed a knot of emotion. Sirius had been through so much pain in his life, that things had turned around for him this much gave him great joy. The boyish excitement on Sirius’ face almost reminded him of the youth he knew so many years ago.

“That’s wonderful news, Pads! Congratulations, Hermione!” He tipped his head to her.

“You’re pregnant!” Ron spoke up first, he gave an almost accusatory look to Sirius. He wasn’t sure how he felt about his eighteen year old friend being knocked up. Sirius was too happy to notice Ron.

“That’s great, Hermione!” Harry read the situation correctly. They were happy about this and if they were happy, he was happy for them. “When are you due?”

Hermione smiled at Harry, pleased that he got it right. "Late September."

"How could this have happened?" Ron's feelings for Hermione had changed drastically in the last few months. He had gotten over her awhile back and was now dating Lavender Brown. What he felt for her now was more that of a brother to a sister. He was behaving much like he would if he found out Ginny was pregnant.

Hermione blushed brightly. How did he think it happened?

"The usual way." Sirius was grinning like a loon.

Remus chuckled quietly at Sirius. He gave Ron a puzzled look, not sure what to make of his behavior.

"What's your problem, Ron?" Harry faced his friend, perplexed as to why Ron couldn't see this was a good thing. "They're happy about this."

Ron looked at Hermione for confirmation, she nodded, smiling, hoping he would catch on.

"Oh. Well, good then." He still wasn't sure if he liked it or not. In his mind Hermione should be in school, not making babies.

"We've got more news than just that though." Hermione smiled at Sirius, encouraging him to continue with their story.

"Well, as it turns out, getting Hermione knocked up..." She interrupted him.

"Sirius!"

"Sorry, sweetheart. Maybe you better explain it."

Hermione sat up a little straighter in her seat. "Well, the way that Professor Dumbledore explained it..."

“Dumbledore? What was he doing there? Is he well?” Remus gave her an apologetic look for interrupting her.

“He’s fine. Finish your story, baby.” Sirius was impatient for them to know that she had her memory back.

“He was just there for a follow up visit, to see how he was doing.” She gave Sirius an exasperated look. “So, he explained that the curse was meant to prevent the mixing of blood, to keep the Black line pure. Since I’m pregnant with Sirius’ child the curse failed in its objective. Getting pregnant broke the curse.”

“That’s...wow, that’s wonderful!” Remus couldn’t believe that the news just kept getting better and better.

“So, you’re not cursed anymore?” Ron could scarcely believe his ears, this was the best news ever. Hermione shook her head in answer to his question.

Harry reached over and squeezed her hand and smiled at her. He knew what it was like to live with the after affects of a curse.

“And now for the best part.” Sirius had their attention. “Because the curse couldn’t hurt her anymore Snape removed the barrier in her brain!” They had forgotten that it was the barrier that caused her memory loss. They gave him puzzled looks, not exactly sure why that was the best part.

“The barrier is what was causing the necklace to glow, without the curse to contain it became unstable. The necklace kept it from hurting me.” Recognition passed over Remus’ face at her words but the boys didn’t know what was special about the necklace. Remus however had been with Sirius the day he bought it.

“The necklace was a protection charm?” Ron looked between Hermione and Sirius, both of them nodded. A look passed over Harry’s face that indicated he understood as well.

“Well, without the barrier...I got my memory back. There will be no more migraines or seizures...” The reality that she was completely whole suddenly overwhelmed Hermione. It was over, it was really over, she had her life back. She started to cry, not even sure why she was crying, she was just so overcome with the enormity of it all.

Their guests were at a loss for what to do. Hermione had just told them the best possible news and broke down into tears. They didn't even have a chance to congratulate her. Sirius seemed to understand, he put his arm around her and pulled her head to his chest. The boys looked like they might say something however a dark look from Sirius had them keeping their peace. He spoke softly to her as she cried, telling her how happy he was to have her back and how much he loved her. Remus and the boys felt a bit awkward, like they were witnessing something that should have been private. After a few minutes Hermione raised her head and sniffed, she looked over at her company and smiled.

“We need to go see my parents, Sirius.” He nodded, she was right. They had to let them know about all of the good news.

“I'm sorry, Harry, Ron...Sirius and I have to go visit my parents right away. We'll be back in a little while though if you just want to relax, make yourself at home.” She felt bad that she had gotten almost no time to visit with them.

They assured her that they understood. They were happy to wait until she returned.

“I can't stay.” Remus gave her a hug. “You see, I have a rather important date with Dora tonight.” He and Sirius exchanged a significant look. Hermione grinned madly at him.

“Good luck, mate.” Sirius winked at his childhood friend. Remus returned a nervous smile and left by floo.

Hermione and Sirius walked out to the backyard and disappeared with a soft ‘pop.’

A/N: Thank you for the reviews!

Hermione always struck me as one who would get involved in politics. She always had a large heart for those who were disenfranchised. I think it will be fun exploring that side of her. Now I've just got to figure out what to do with Sirius while she is off changing the world.

Announcements

Hermione turned her face into the spray letting the water warm and refresh her. She turned around, letting it run through her hair and let out a long breath. Her life was picking up pace at an alarming rate, it was threatening to overwhelm. She was a breakout sensation on the wizard social scene, pregnant, in love and she hadn't even taken her NEWTs yet. It was all a bit much. She was having trouble feeling real.

If she could choose just one she would keep 'in love.' Sirius was her growling, bristling dark knight who wrapped her up safe and secure in his love. They had faced so many challenges together, even if some were self induced, they always made it to the other side. She knew she would always be safe, loved and well cared for.

She picked up her scrubby, pouring out a bit of body wash onto it. She breathed the scent in deeply, letting it refresh and relax her. She let the delightful, sudsy bubbles scrub away the previous day's grime. She was determined to take as long as possible, giving Sirius a little while to cool down after he was done killing Harry and Ron.

They were just waking up, just starting to get frisky when they were startled into full wakefulness by Sirius' stereo blasting at painful decibels. She was certain it was an accident but that didn't stop Sirius from being grumpy about it. To avoid getting dragged in on either side she had snuck off to the shower.

She was a bit put out about it herself, they would have little time to be alone today. When the news reached Molly Weasley's ears she insisted they have a party in Hermione's honor. She and her mother were cooking up a storm, soon the house would be full of people and they would all want a piece of her.

She and Sirius hadn't had a chance to talk alone or reconnect since her memory was restored. Her mother had insisted on getting in touch with Molly who had been a source of strength to Jean through out the ordeal. Jean and Molly had become close friends despite the fact that one was muggle and the other was magic. When the news of Hermione's pregnancy had been revealed Jean was adamant that Molly be informed. Hermione and Sirius were kept up late by the pair

despite Herman Granger who kept reminding them of the time. By the time they got home they collapsed into bed and fell asleep.

Hermione reached for the shampoo to wash her hair, a pair of large strong hands beat her to it. Sirius was standing just outside the shower, nude and hard. His eyes roamed over Hermione's wet body with unashamed lust, sending a thrill through Hermione. She raised an eyebrow to Sirius giving him a look that clearly said, 'you can't mean in here, can you?' Sirius returned her look with a mischievous smile as he stepped into the shower.

They were in tight quarters in the shower, his erection pressed insistently against her body as the spray wet his form. He gently washed her hair while pressing her body against the back tiles of the shower stall. She felt a thrill of excitement at the thought of christening the bathroom. They hadn't been as adventurous of late and now that she had her memory back she found herself missing it. As he ran his hands through her hair she felt her body warming up, heat pooled between her legs in anticipation.

He was teasing her, his erection promised pleasure but he was making her wait. He guided her hair under the water rinsing the foam out of her hair. He washed his own body with her help, unable to keep her hands off of him. She stroked his cock hoping to drive him as crazy as he was making her. She tested his will power but he remained strong. She tried to pull him into a kiss but he stepped playfully away from her as much as he could in the small shower. She released a frustrated groan.

"Stop teasing me!"

"No!" His eyes flashed with mirth over the state he was working her into.

His lips finally met hers, his hands ran down her sides and along her stomach pausing significantly over her belly. He was awed that she would be a mother, that she was going to make him a father.

He was a little nervous about the other shoe dropping to the floor. Every time he was delirious with happiness something happened. He glanced at the charm on her neck, hoping it would be enough. She caught his glance at her neck and knew what he was thinking about. He was going to be dangerously protective of her over the next nine months. He would be difficult to keep in check. Fighting him on this point would be a useless expenditure of her energy. She and everyone they knew would just have to work around it.

His lips left hers to nip along her jaw, she snuck her arms around his neck, holding on as she felt herself weaken. He trailed slowly along her neck to her collar bone, his hands massaged her breasts. Hermione called out to him as he stoked the fire in her body. She instinctively opened her stance, inviting his invasion of her body. He easily lifted her body, pushing her against the tiles, she wrapped her legs tightly around his waist. He pushed himself into her, gaining a loud moan from her, he relished the feel of their union. She was overwhelmed by the sensation. The warm water caressed their bodies, flowing down to where they were joined.

Sirius was impatient but he wanted to hear her call out to him, hear her moan and sigh for him, beg him to release the tension in her body. He kept his strokes slow and deep, his eyes locked on her face, enjoying the expressions he could pull from her. The sounds of their union reverberated off the tiles, wrapping them up in the sensuous sounds.

She tried to increase the speed but he had her by the hips, manipulating her how he wanted. She begged and pleaded with him, frustrated with his smug grin. Her senses were soaring, her moans became louder and grittier with each forceful thrust as he took her harder. His need increased as her tight heat beacons him to seek his release.

His thrusting became more and more powerful, he couldn't deny her any longer. He pistoned in and out, harder and faster, he called to her desperately as his language descended into filth. He needed his release, needed to empty himself completely in her depths. He slammed into her forcefully, almost painfully until he felt her tight sleeve shudder and clamp around his thickness. His thrusting

became erratic as he shot himself into her, his heart racing, panting out his pleasure.

He dropped his head to her shoulder, exhausted and sated, kissing her shoulder between each deep breath. He let her off the wall with a satisfied grin, the water washing away the evidence of their union. He playfully slapped her bottom as he stepped away from her and out of the shower, tossing a grin over his shoulder. He grabbed a towel and threw one to her. She couldn't think of a better way to start her day.

Once he was dry he hung up his towel and threw some sweats on and left the bedroom. Harry and Ron were playing exploding snap, they looked up as he emerged from the bedroom. Ron colored brightly and Harry rolled his eyes. Sirius grinned cheekily at them, realizing they had heard their frolic in the shower. As far as he was concerned these two were grown men and as such could handle it. No one ever told Hermione that a Silencing Charm might not be a bad idea. She would be horribly embarrassed and all parties wanted to spare her that.

Sirius walked into the kitchen to make breakfast and found it was already done.

"Who made breakfast?"

"I did," answered Harry.

"Thanks, mate."

"Well, we were hungry and there was no telling when you two would be out." Harry threw a dig at Sirius with a smirk.

"Cheeky!" Sirius grinned at Harry, relieved some of the easiness between them was returning.

"I have my moments." Harry had decided to forgive Sirius. He hadn't returned him to the pedestal and probably never would but their exchanges were comfortable and friendly once again.

Sirius made a plate for himself and sat at the dining room table. When Hermione emerged ready for the day all teasing of a personal nature was discontinued, the conversation turned to the coming events. They were expecting a houseful of people.

“You better put some more clothes on!” Hermione was surprised he hadn’t put on more than just sweatpants. She eyed his hard, decorated chest with an appreciative eye. She made herself a plate and sat down beside him.

“See something you like?” He gave her a cheeky, sexy grin and chuckled when she went a little pink.

“I remember the last time you said that to me.” She was remembering how he had paraded his nude body in front of her the morning after she returned from the hospital. He was deliberately pushing her buttons as he knew exactly where they were. She was fascinated by his form and put her hands on him whenever she could.

“Oh, when was that?” He didn’t remember his casual comment to her.

“Right after you brought me home from the hospital.” There was something in her tone that told him she was calling him out.

“Oh,” he chuckled softly and nuzzled her neck affectionately. “As I remember, you couldn’t keep your eyes off me then either.”

“They’re at it again.” They both looked up from the dining room table upon hearing Ron’s words.

“What do you mean again?” Hermione fixed her gaze at Ron with a little frown.

“Never mind, Hermione. Don’t listen to him, he’s an idiot.” Harry glared at Ron. “Git.”

“Do you know what he’s on about?” She turned to Sirius.

“Not a clue.” Hermione narrowed her eyes at Sirius but he was poker faced. She knew something was being kept from her.

“You don’t think they heard, do you?” She whispered her words, coloring a little at the thought.

“Nah, they didn’t. We were in the bathroom, how could they?” He spoke in low tones to keep up the pretense. He conveniently left out that they probably heard every sigh with clarity as the sound was reverberating off the bathroom walls.

Hermione wasn’t satisfied, unconvinced of the answer. It was however more palatable to believe their love life was private so she accepted the answer with a seed of doubt. Silencing Charms would wear off over night and it was difficult to think when he was setting her body aflame. She wondered if there was a magical artifact that would set up an overnight Silencing Charm to protect them in the morning hours.

Sirius finished first, took his plate to the kitchen and headed in the direction of the bedroom. He paused to stretch when he was in front of Hermione, casually looking at her from beneath his dark locks. Just as he hoped her eyes were on his body. She caught him watching her, blushed and frowned. He was just a little too conceited for his own good. He sauntered triumphantly in the direction of the bedroom, rather smug about the ego boost she had just given him. She freed him from his self doubt and it had a lot more to do with her love than her heated looks. Time in her embrace brought forth true self confidence that he had lost to the dementors.

Hermione brought her plate to the kitchen, she heard a car pull up and went to the front door to see if it was her parents. She waved at them and went outside to help her mother bring in the food.

“How are you feeling, dear?” It was too soon for the morning sickness to have set in but that didn’t stop her mother from fussing over her only daughter.

“I’m great, mum! Wow! You made a lot of food!” Her mother had made a mountain of finger sandwiches. She also brought pickled onions, kippers and biscuits.

“It’s not every day that you get celebrate your only daughter’s pregnancy!” Hermione smiled at her mother knowing that she too was going to be a bit over protective.

Hermione picked up a tray of sandwiches only to have a pair of strong hands take it away. Sirius frowned at Hermione, not wanting her to strain herself.

“Really, Sirius! It’s just a tray of sandwiches!” He completely ignored her protestation, took the other tray of sandwiches from her mother and returned to the house. Her mother beamed approvingly at him while Hermione released a small frustrated groan.

“Oh, just let him, dear! He’s been through enough with you and just wants to see you safe.” Jean Granger ignored her daughter’s huff of indignation.

“I’m not some fragile china doll.” Hermione noted with agitation that she might as well be speaking to the house for all the response she got. She followed behind her father who was resolved to stay out of it. If Sirius wanted to spend the next nine months being over protective and a little over bearing it was for him and Hermione to work out.

Hermione walked in the house and shut the door a little harshly to be considered casual. Harry and Ron looked up but her husband and parents ignored her small tantrum. She walked over to couch and threw herself in between them.

“What’s the matter?” Harry gave her a concerned look.

“Them,” she said darkly, pointing at Sirius and her mother.

“What’d they do?” Ron couldn’t see that they were doing anything wrong.

“I’m going to spend the next nine months being treated like some sort of china doll.” Hermione was working herself into a real snit over this.

“Anything we can do?” Harry hadn’t really thought about how her pregnancy would affect Sirius but now that he was he realized it made sense. Sirius fancied himself her protector and being the passionate man that he was he could see Sirius getting carried away with it.

“Don’t treat me any different, like I’m weak or incapable.” Hermione stated her request simply without dramatics.

“You? Weak or incapable?” Ron scoffed at the notion.

“You’re just plain, old Hermione to us,” said Harry, a hint of humor in his voice.

“Thank you.” Hermione gave Harry a wry grin.

There was a noise at the fireplace and out of it stepped Fred and George, each laden with a tray of food. They were followed in by Angelina Johnson and Alicia Spinnet. They came in talking loudly as they made their way over to the dining room table before finding Hermione. They settled themselves around her.

“Granger!” Fred grinned cheekily at her.

“Oi!” Sirius narrowed his eyes at Fred. “That’s Black or none at all!” Sirius was wearing a playful grin.

Fred ignored Sirius and smirked at Hermione. “You’ll always be Granger to me!”

“Heard Sirius got you in the family way!” George made his lewd comment with a smug grin.

“Oh, come on!” Ron tried to defend Hermione against his brothers’ assault. Harry snickered but pulled it together at Hermione’s dark, reproachful look.

“Pipe down, little one!” George spoke dismissively to Ron.

“How big do you figure she’ll get, George?” Fred ignored her indignant huff.

“Big as a house, I’d wager, Fred!” George grinned wickedly. Hermione knew it was useless to try and stop them. She was beat red but was glad that at least they weren’t treating her delicately.

“Don’t be such prats!” Angelina playfully slapped Fred. Alicia gave George a stern look.

“You look really well,” said Alicia. Hermione’s tan was fading but she still bore the signs of sun kissed skin. It didn’t hurt that she was as happy as she had ever been. Sirius’ over protectiveness was a minor irritation and to be expected. All in all she was thrilled with her unconventional life.

“So do you!” Alicia was positively glowing. Hermione noticed that Angelina was as well. She raised her eyebrows at the pair of them.

“We have announcements as well but you’ll just have to wait!” Angelina looked smug as she answered Hermione’s unasked question.

There was another noise at the fireplace, Ginny and her mother stepped through. They too carried a tray of food each. They were followed by Arthur Weasley who also had a tray of food. The doorbell rang, Sirius let in Remus and Tonks. A few minutes later it rang again and in walked Bill and Fleur. Tonks and Fleur settled themselves with the younger crowd while Remus and Bill joined Sirius, Arthur and Herman Granger. Bill quietly handed something to Sirius who returned a huge grin. When Ginny finished helping her mother she joined Hermione and the others. Her mother and Jean Granger busied themselves with setting up the food.

Tonks was grinning and looked like she was about to explode. Fleur settled herself gracefully, wearing a secretive smile.

“Have you heard Fred and George’s news or are they being all mysterious about it.” Ginny settled herself comfortably in a chair.

“Mysterious,” confirmed Harry.

“Oh, please wait!” Angelina gave Ginny an anxious look. Ginny giggled and nodded.

“There is quite a lot of news in the Weasley family.” Ginny delivered a little teaser about what was to come.

“Oh?” Harry gave his girlfriend an interested look.

“We’re engaged!” Tonks blurted out her news, sticking her left hand out for everyone to see. She said it loud enough for the whole house to hear.

Sirius grinned at Remus. “Well done, mate!” He had to chuckle at the slight coloration creeping up Remus’ neck.

“You, too?” Bill gave Remus a surprised look.

“You and Fleur?” Sirius smiled at Bill who nodded. Sirius was pleased to see that life was getting back on track for those that he cared about. The Weasley men who were of age had broken off their engagements after the marriage law had passed. They had stepped up to marry muggleborn witches who were in need. None of it had come to pass and it looked like Bill was pursuing Fleur once again.

“Alright, it looks like all who could make it are here.” Molly addressed the house full of people. “We have several exciting announcements to make. Who wants to go first?”

Sirius took a step back wanting to save their announcement for the last. Hermione looked over at him but he shook his head. She gave him a puzzled look but shrugged her shoulders.

Fred and George stood up and dramatically offered their hands to Angelina and Alicia. They escorted them to the front of the crowd of people with huge grins on their faces. Angelina and Alicia were positively glowing.

“We are getting married!” Fred wrapped his arms around Angelina and kissed her sweetly on the cheek.

“As are we!” George put his arm around Alicia and kissed the top of her head.

The house clapped and cheered as they offered up their congratulations. Arthur Weasley pulled Molly into a comforting embrace, she had started to cry from happiness.

“Don’t worry mum, we’ll be able to support our families.” George gave his mother a half grin. She looked like she was going to say something but Fred cut her off.

“We’ll be fine examples for our children.” Angelina’s dark skin took on a red tinge, she nudged him playfully.

Molly was overcome with happiness but she was trying to brush it off. She murmured something into Arthur’s shoulder that sounded suspiciously like ‘joke shop’ and ‘irresponsible.’ The rest was incomprehensible. The whole house laughed affectionately, Molly was fooling no one.

“Alright,” said Arthur. “Who’s next?”

Bill strode forward and extended his hand to Fleur. She got up gracefully and stood beside Bill. He wrapped his arm around her waist. He wore a wide, delighted smile, Fleur looked up at him, adoration in her eyes.

“We are engaged!” Fleur held her large engagement ring up for all to see. Another loud choked sob was heard from Molly. Congratulations were offered all around. Bill and Fleur stepped back to join Fred and Angelina and George and Alicia.

“Charlie and Katinka couldn’t get away from Romania but were happy to announce that he asked for her hand in marriage and she accepted happily.” Arthur made the announcement in Charlie’s stead.

Molly sobbed loudly about how happy she was that her family was back to normal once again. The war was over, the lives that had been unhappily altered had righted themselves.

Sirius nudged Remus. “You first, mate.”

Remus nodded and looked at Tonks. She got up rather ungracefully and tripped once on her way over to Remus. He put a confident arm around her waist to hold and steady her.

“We’re getting married!” She had already let it slip but everyone offered their congratulations once again.

Molly Weasley held herself together but nodded happily at the pair.

Sirius waited until Remus and Tonks stood off to the side, not wanting to steal his friend’s thunder. He strode forward confidently and led Hermione to the front where everyone else had made their announcements. He wrapped his arms around her with her back flush against his chest.

“I don’t know if you’ve all heard or not but Hermione is no longer suffering the ill affects from the curse. She is well and her memory has been restored to her.” Sirius beamed proudly to the room. A cheer rose up from all quarters causing her to blush deeply. “We have some more wonderful news. Baby, would you like to tell everyone?”

Hermione nodded and addressed the room. "We're going to have a baby!" A collective 'aw' rose up from all the women and girls. They were getting up to rush the couple but Sirius put his hand up.

“There’s something else I need to do. Something I need to make right.” Sirius smiled at Hermione. He spun her around and dropped to one knee. “I had this one checked for curses, baby.” He motioned his head in the direction of Bill Weasley who was a professional Curse Breaker. “What’d you say? Let’s have that ceremony!”

Hermione dropped to ground next him nodding furiously, tears threatening to break free. Molly and Jean were crying openly in the background.

Sirius opened a box that contained a stunning, large princess cut diamond solitaire. The light in the house refracted off the ring giving off glints of sparkling color. He slipped the ring on her finger, everyone held their breath.

Hermione threw her arms around his neck and he spun her around, laughing, filled to overflowing with joy.

For the first time that anyone could remember nothing bad happened at all.

[illegible]

A/N: Thank you for the reviews!

I'm sorry it took so long to put a chapter out. My life is in the crapper at the moment. I doubt if I will be able to do more than one a week for the foreseeable future.

I realized I needed to wrap a few more loose ends up. I left the Weasley's broken engagements hanging for far too long.

To answer the question about whether or not the healer was able to tell if she was pregnant. Well, 1.) It's magic which makes the seemingly impossible possible. To believe in it at all you must

suspend disbelief. 2.) The curse was broken at the moment of conception in the fallopian tubes. If need be, for the purpose of this story, Sirius has strong fast swimmers, Hermione's egg was ripe for conception. 3.) This is a fiction.

PLEASE REVIEW-I could use the confidence boost!

Witch Weekly

Hermione let her hair out of the messy bun with a huff. She brushed it out and applied a little more Sleakeasy's Hair Potion and had another go. She hated doing this sort of thing but she was a little nervous and wanted to look her best, she would be receiving Betty Braithwaite for tea that afternoon. Braithwaite was a freelance reporter, her interviews were usually in the Daily Prophet but she was doing a special piece on Hermione for Witch Weekly. Hermione continued to wrestle with her hair even as little chunks fell disobediently out of her grasp.

"I should just hex it right off my head."

Hermione heard the sound of stifled laughter from behind her, she looked over her shoulder to see Sirius grinning affectionately at her. He had come in to see how her nerves were and found he couldn't resist watching the spectacle of Hermione and her hair.

"What are you laughing at?"

"I think you're adorable."

Hermione blushed, she chose to ignore his comment, turning her attention back to her hair. She glared mutinously at her reflection. She had been reconsidering this interview ever since she agreed to it. Sirius had suggested she go to the beauty spa but being stubborn and frugal, she declined. Now that she was just a few hours away from the interview she was regretting her decision. She continued to fuss with it getting more and more frustrated. She let her hair out of the proposed bun. It fell around her face as she groaned in irritation.

"I like it down better than up." Sirius got up from the bed and walked up behind her, kneading his fingers along her neck and across her shoulders in an attempt to help her relax and release a little tension. "You just don't seem to know how pretty you are."

Hermione pinked a little as she always did when he complimented her. It pleased her that he did so but she never really saw what he

apparently did. She was never quite sure what to say and so always gave a quiet 'thank you' without meeting his eyes.

"I'm really not that pr..." Sirius spun her around and stopped her words with his lips on hers. He ran one hand through her hair, with the other he pulled her close to his body. All ability to think or feel stress fled her as he swallowed her quiet moan.

"You're beautiful." He gazed adoringly into her soft brown eyes, willing her to believe as he did. "Wear your hair down, baby. I like it that way, it's more who you are. You're stressed out because you're trying to be someone you're not."

"But you said..."

He brought his hands up to cradle her face, tilting her gaze to meet his. "I said you should do the interview, not alter who you are. That's the thing about being in the public eye, you have to be yourself. The minute you change who you are to cater to it you begin to lose yourself."

"There's nothing special about me, Sirius." He started to interrupt but she stilled him with a hand to his mouth, never breaking their eye contact. "I wasn't born into Wizard aristocracy or cheated death or been hunted as a dangerous killer. I'm just...me, you know what I mean? Whatever this attention I'm getting is about...it's more to do with you than with me. So, if I want to use it, as has been suggested, don't I have to play to it a little?" He could tell by looking at her that she wasn't enjoying this. She was a practical girl who was being shoved into a dress that was far too frivolous for her taste.

"I don't want you to do that. Whatever you think their expectation is of you, if you give it, you will have to keep giving it. Isn't it easier to just be yourself?" His tone turned from honest and sincere to flirtatious with a wink of his eye. "Besides...my fame isn't going anywhere, you can just..." He motioned with his hand, gliding it along an imaginary plane. "...ride on my coattails indefinitely." He ended with a roguish grin.

Hermione gave him a light, playful slap on the shoulder. "Just be myself, expectations be damned?"

She startled him slightly with her use of coarse language, outside of their playtime she never swore. It made him appreciate how much tension she was feeling from all of this. He raised an eyebrow at her, making her blush.

"Well, if I wasn't certain before, I surely am now." He teased her lightly for her language. It wasn't that he minded, it was out of character for her. "Why don't you wash all that junk out of your hair," he wrinkled his nose slightly, "put on a nice dress that you like and relax a little? Your mum will be here shortly, I'm sure she has nerves enough for all of us." He didn't wait for a reply, he just threw her a smile from over his shoulder as he left her to her preparations.

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Sirius had showered and dressed himself for her interview that morning. She had suggested that he might spend the day with Remus but he wanted to be there for moral support. She had never given an interview whereas he had done this many times. Ever since he had returned from the Veil he found himself a rather popular commodity. He had tested his fame's resiliency with his playful ways and his women. Instead of losing favor his popularity soared, particularly with witches. They hunted him but he was willing prey. It wasn't that hard to get a piece of Sirius Black. The attention of his pursuers helped him to forget the Veil, the dementors, James, Lily, his family...but it never lasted. He always awoke the next morning, the same man, broken and pathetic.

She changed all that.

When he was called upon to marry her it was a rather significant moment for him. For the first time in years he felt truly needed, the circumstance and situation were awful to be sure, but he had a purpose, finally. He took his duty to this young witch very seriously, he was her protector, her savior, just as she had been his. He willingly altered his whole life, the further she drew him in the more he realized this was what he needed all along. Falling in love with her

had been easy, believing he was worthy of her had been harder. Accepting her love was beyond his ability to control, from the moment she asked him to let her love him he was lost in her.

Her love was healing the years of damage he had taken at the hands of the dementors. She filled the dark places with light and love, making him whole again. He was learning to accept himself once again and remember the confident young man he had been before he was stripped of every good thing and thrown away. He wasn't even sure if she knew what she had done, it would be difficult for him to talk about. His solution was to lavish her with everything he had to offer.

The doorbell rang, Jean Granger had offered to come and lend moral support to her daughter.

"Hello, Jean. Come on in." Sirius opened the door and took the small tray of finger sandwiches and home made Victoria sponge.

"Good to see you, Sirius. Thank you." She insisted that Hermione allow her to prepare everything. Hermione was grateful for the help and was looking forward to the visit with her mother.

"Where's our girl?"

"Fighting with her hair, last I saw. I think she might be taking another shower." Sirius had heard the shower come on a few minutes ago, pleased she had taken his advice.

"It's very exciting that she is going to be interviewed. Molly showed me the periodical that the article will run in." Jean remembered Hermione crying to her about the last article Witch Weekly had run on her. She had heard the explanation for why she agreed to this interview but was unconvinced that this was a good idea. She was worried that the stress from trying to join an imposing group of women where she might not be wholly welcome would prove problematic for the pregnancy.

“I’m quite proud of her.” Sirius was worried about the pregnancy as well. He hadn’t said anything but was resolved to watch her like a hawk. If she showed signs of stress he was prepared to put his foot down.

There was a noise at the fireplace, both Jean and Sirius looked over to see Molly Weasley step through with a small bag. Hermione stepped out of the bedroom, her hair was dried and she was wearing it down. She had her favorite dress on, it was comfortable but appropriate to the occasion. Sirius flashed her a huge smile as she and Molly made their way over.

Sirius took a hand of hers each in his hands, holding them wide so he could take a good look at her. He released one of her hands to spin her under his arm.

“You look beautiful, sweetheart.” She glanced up at him, smiled and blushed.

“Thank you.”

“How are you feeling, dear?” Jean took a critical look at her daughter.

“She’s just fine, Jeanie. She’s only been pregnant a week. I’ll bet the morning sickness hasn’t even set in yet has it?” Molly chided Hermione’s mother gently for fussing over her so soon. She had been pregnant enough times to know that Hermione would appreciate it more in the later months.

Hermione shook her head in answer to Molly’s question, grateful that someone was willing to be reasonable about all of this.

“Here is a potion I made for you, dear. It will make the morning sickness seem like nothing.” Molly reached into her bag and handed Hermione a small glass bottle with a cork stopper. She took it gratefully with a smile. “Just three drops in the morning is all you need.”

“No morning sickness?” Jean sounded skeptical, she was a doctor and had never heard of such a thing.

“Goodness, no! Why would anyone go through that?” Molly laughed lightly, she knew Jean was always surprised by these little discoveries.

“ Oh, goodness! Look at the time!” Hermione glanced at the grandfather clock in the living room. She hurried into the kitchen and began to prepare the tea. “Mum, thanks so much for making all of this.”

“Not at all, well I guess I’d better be off. Your guest will be arriving soon. Molly, shopping tomorrow?” Jean walked into the kitchen and gave her daughter a hug.

“Oh, yes, that’s right, I’ll see you tomorrow then.” Molly smiled at her friend and waved good bye.

Jean patted Sirius on the shoulder before leaving the way she came.

“That’s it for me as well. I’ll be looking for that article! Good luck, Hermione.” Hermione and Sirius bade her good bye before Molly returned home by floo.

Hermione made to move the tea service into the living room’s coffee table but was halted by Sirius.

“I know you think I’m being over protective. I know it gets on your nerves but I’m asking you to please humor me.” Sirius gently acknowledged his insecurity and asked her to play along to assuage his fears. She was precious to him and was now, in his opinion, in a somewhat delicate state.

He was asking so nicely and sincerely instead of just doing as he pleased. She appreciated the gesture and nodded her head. He thanked her, easily picked up the silver set and took into the family room. Hermione followed in with the tray of sandwiches, Sirius

returned to kitchen and a moment later he entered with the Victoria sponge.

“Your mum makes the best.” He indicated the cake he was bringing in.

“I’m glad she offered to help.” Her mother had given her one less thing to stress about. “I think I’ll go take one more look at myself.”

Sirius smiled as she left the family room for one last fret. She walked through the bedroom straight back to the bathroom. She couldn’t find anything particularly wrong, she wished she was just a little more glamorous but the truth was, that just wasn’t her. She gave a little jump when she heard the door bell ring. She gave herself one last look, brushing away a tendril that had fallen into her face.

“Show time.” She spoke quietly to herself before leaving the bathroom to answer the door.

Hermione walked out of the bedroom and sought out Sirius with her eyes, seeking reassurance. He gave her a supporting smile and watched as she went to the door. She opened it and greeted her guest, her first step into a potential new future.

“Ms. Braithwaite, do come in. Welcome to our home.” Hermione ushered the reporter in.

“Hello, Mrs. Black. Please, call me Betty.” Braithwaite wore crisp, stylish well tailored robes. She was as different from Rita Skeeter as white is from black. She projected an aura that was business like while also soothing and relaxing. In some respects she was even more dangerous than Skeeter, this woman could get behind the guard.

“Welcome Ms. Braithwaite.” Sirius’ melodic baritone startled the reporter. She thought she would have the little girl all to herself. Her professionalism saved her, she didn’t let her surprise or disappointment show through.

“Thank you, Mr. Black and please, it's Betty.” Braithwaite sized Sirius up without seeming to do so. She put on her warmest smile knowing it was the best way to break through walls.

“Alright, then please call me Sirius.” He gestured to the family room.

Braithwaite would have considered it a victory that she was now on a first name basis with him except that he was experienced at this game. He knew what to say and how to say it. He was constantly in the public eye and understood what sort of animal a reporter was. She was disappointed that her quarry hadn't taken the invitation. It was still Mrs. Black for her. The reporter settled herself on a couch and let Hermione serve her tea. The three of them chatted idly for a few minutes, enjoying Jean Granger's efforts.

“Well, Mrs. Black, shall we get started?” Braithwaite gave Hermione a comforting smile. She had been easing the girl into her confidence through light conversation. Hermione was clearly tense and Braithwaite could tell it would be difficult to break through that.

“Sure, you can call me Hermione.” She gave her a nervous smile.

Braithwaite smiled inwardly that the formalities were breaking down. “I'd like to skip past the obvious, we all know that you are close friends with Harry Potter. I'd like to ask you about a different school mate of yours; tell me about Draco Malfoy.” Braithwaite suppressed a gloating smile at the looks of surprise from both Sirius and Hermione.

“He attacked my wife on multiple occasions, he got himself kicked out. Hermione had very little to do with that.” Sirius ended with a low growl in his voice. He wondered what this woman was playing at. He knew he had given her more of a reaction than he would have liked but he wasn't going to allow Hermione to take another kick from that poncy pureblood.

Braithwaite silently congratulated herself for getting under his skin. So, this was a sensitive issue...but why? There was something about the dynamic of these two that she felt she needed to better understand. She closely observed Hermione's reaction, which was to pat Sirius

reassuringly on the knee. The beast that flickered behind Sirius' countenance may as well have licked her hand and curled up to sleep.

"Draco was rather ugly to me, he basically stalked me on my way to class. My confrontations with him led to us fleeing the country." Hermione was a little less nervous now that she knew this woman was an adversary. Understanding the relationship helped to calm her nerves.

"You had to flee the country? I hadn't heard about that." Now it was Braithwaite's turn to be off balance. She expected to hear a story about petty muggleborn versus pureblood rivalry. She didn't realize she was about to stumble upon a story with teeth. The current political climate had the wizarding world kissing arse to muggleborns. She had hoped to play on that angle.

Together Hermione and Sirius told the story of her confrontation with Draco and then eventually Lucius Malfoy and even Bellatrix Lestrange. What was even more interesting to Braithwaite than the story itself was the way these two talked about it. Hermione glowed when she told how Sirius had forced a proper apology out of Draco. When Sirius was speaking about their escape he unconsciously pulled her a little closer to him. Braithwaite had come looking for an angle with a bite but found herself smitten with this unlikely couple. She had suspected that they were playing up her muggleborn status to her advantage. Braithwaite was no longer convinced of that.

There was a deep bond between these two, deep enough to withstand high levels of stress and danger and come out closer on the other side. As she listened to them speak, her story changed. She had originally wanted to take a different tack from Rita Skeeter who practically kissed Sirius' arse in her interviews. Instead of petty childhood rivalry, she had a story about a rather romantic couple. It would seem that the press still loved one Sirius Black.

"I guess the only thing left to ask you Hermione is where did you run to?" Braithwaite considered this a simple question, her quill was poised for the quick answer.

“We’ve never told anyone...” began Sirius, with a glance at Hermione.

“You know, in case we ever had to return.” Hermione caught his glance and smiled softly at him, remembering how they fell in love.

“Secret hideaway, then?” Braithwaite just couldn’t help herself, she loved these two.

“Something like that, Betty.” Sirius wore a lazy smirk to hide the seriousness of keeping the location a secret.

“Well, let’s move on then. I’m rather interested in hearing how you ended up in St. Mungo’s, Hermione. I understand you were there for a week and that it was pretty serious.” Braithwaite had done quite a bit of research for this interview.

Hermione flicked her eyes at Sirius, there was a complicated answer to that question. He smiled at her and nodded.

“Well, as you know, I’m muggleborn.” Braithwaite nodded that she did indeed know that.

“Well, Sirius and I eloped...” Hermione paused when Braithwaite scribbled a few notes down. She hoped there weren’t going to be too many questions about how they got married. She and Sirius had agreed to go public with that information when they sat down with Rita Skeeter. Rita had helped them with the Office for the Control of Unmarried Muggleborns. Hermione wasn’t thrilled to be doing the interview but put her trust in Sirius.

“How romantic.” Braithwaite purred her words. The slight flinch Hermione gave wasn’t lost on her, Sirius draped his arm around Hermione in comfort. He knew that being forced to marry was a hard memory for Hermione and that it hadn’t been that romantic for either of them. “Where did you honeymoon?”

“Austria, it was beautiful there wasn’t it, baby?” Sirius steered the interview where they had agreed to take it. Hermione nodded and smiled at him.

Braithwaite wondered what was being held back, she made a note of Hermione’s odd reaction, not really sure how to bring it out. Braithwaite was going to ask how they fell in love, something she had neglected to ask while hearing about their adventures with Draco Malfoy. Sirius sensed a question like that was forthcoming so he jumped to the point.

“It was all rather sudden, I never even got her an engagement ring...” Sirius proceeded with the tale about the ring. Hermione had gone very quiet as he explained the curse and how it worked. All was forgiven but his recklessness still hurt a bit. She was glad they had moved forward, she was truly happy with him but that time in her life was a difficult one.

“Is that the ring in question?” Braithwaite indicated Hermione’s new engagement ring.

“Oh, no...” Hermione glanced at Sirius with a smile. “He just gave this to me last week.”

“We’re going to have that ceremony after all.” Sirius kissed her sweetly on the temple.

“That’s really wonderful news, you two.” Braithwaite wrote herself a reminder about the upcoming ceremony. “How long were you in St. Mungo’s?” Braithwaite made a note to research the Toujours Pur curse. That was definitely going in her article. It would play nicely to the public who were sympathetic to the plight of muggleborns these days.

“I was there a week before Severus Snape was able to contain the curse.” Hermione’s voice was quiet, she hadn’t realized how hard talking about this would be.

“The Hogwart’s professor?”

“The same.”

“So, you were fine after that?” Braithwaite didn’t know anything about the memory loss, seizures, migraines or difficulties with motor control. She only knew that Hermione had been in St. Mungo’s and that it was under mysterious circumstances.

“Oh, no. He kept the curse from killing me but...” Hermione ran through the list of ailments left in the wake of the curse. Braithwaite gaped at her in open shock at how much this young woman had to suffer. The look of pain and guilt etched into Sirius’ face was stark and startling. It completely changed the way he looked. These two had faced more than most and it all seemed to surround his and her positions in life at birth.

“How much of your memory did you lose?” Braithwaite recovered from her shock, she was a professional after all.

“It was about six months.” Hermione leaned her head against Sirius chest for strength, this conversation was hard on her.

“So, you don’t remember getting married, do you?” Braithwaite looked at the couple with some astonishment, how did they pull it back together if she couldn’t remember anything? “You seem to recall the events in your life with clarity, how is that possible?”

“Oh, I’ve got my memory back now. It took about...” She looked at Sirius to help her with the time frame.

“Seems like it was around a month or so. A very, very long month.” The look of guilt had yet to ease off of his face.

“Wow.” Braithwaite took a moment to recover. Their life certainly wasn’t boring. “How did you get your memory back? What about the other symptoms?”

Sirius and Hermione shared a smile. Braithwaite looked between them, there was something rather significant to how she got her memory back.

“You see, the curse was all about keeping the Black line pure, meaning only pureblood children.” Hermione and Sirius had agreed to give Braithwaite the scoop about her pregnancy. “If that objective failed then so did the curse.”

“Meaning?”

“We’re expecting.”

“Wow.” Braithwaite sat up a little straighter to collect her thoughts. “So, you’re a muggleborn cursed by purebloods and the way to break the curse was to get pregnant by a pureblood? I’m sorry, I know that sounds a little crass but is that the gist of it?” Braithwaite was stunned. She was giddy with the thought of the ripple effect this piece would have. The tension between muggleborns and the rest of wizard society was slowly ramping up since the end of the war. This article might just uncork it.

“We’re not sure if it’s specific to purebloods or the Black line itself, but yes, that’s it in a nutshell.” Sirius felt it a victory that their love had cured her. In essence, he had cured her. It made room for him to forgive himself, eventually.

“I must say, you two don’t have boring lives. A little too exciting to be honest.” Braithwaite had come to gently shred them but found she just couldn’t. They were a remarkable couple who had faced staggering odds. “I just have one more question and then I’ll be on my way. It has been rumored that you attracted the attention of the Daughter’s of the International Warlock Convention. Does that rumor have any merit?”

“Well, I’ve been invited to attend one of their meetings, so I suppose the answer is yes. I’m not at all sure what they want to talk to me about.” Hermione realized the day after reading the letter that an

invitation to join was perhaps a bit presumptuous. She had only been invited to one meeting and had not been told why.

“Hazard a guess?”

“I’d love to but I’m just as in the dark as you.”

Braithwaite smiled at the pair, she stood to leave and was escorted to the front door by Hermione and Sirius.

“You’ll receive a free copy of Witch Weekly when the article runs. Thank you so much for taking the time to talk with me. It’s been a pleasure getting to know both of you.” She shook both of their hands before leaving.

Sirius quietly closed the front door and followed Hermione back into the living room. She sat down looking a little shell shocked. It had been a hard afternoon for her. He was about to sit down when she suddenly stood up.

“You know, with all of this excitement I haven’t been keeping up with my studies. I’ve really got to be more disciplined.” She gently brushed past Sirius in the direction of the library.

He let her go without a fight. He wanted to comfort her but sensed that what she needed right now was a little time alone.

[illegible]

A/N: Thank you for the reviews!

I appreciate all the good will being sent my way. Things are still confused and difficult but I'm starting to adjust, very slowly.

I need to say this because I'm insecure about it. I know nothing about English tea time. What I know now I got off of Wikipedia. My mother is German, I spent my summers over there. They have a similar custom which is three o'clock coffee and cake. What I didn't learn

from Wikipedia I patterned after those childhood memories. If it seems like I glossed over the tea, you'd be right.

In the right light my diamonds sparkle. For our ten year anniversary my husband bought me a ring with three diamonds that came with a certificate, guaranteeing color, quality, that sort of thing. I can say with absolute certainty that they are real diamonds and that they do indeed sparkle. I was just going off my own experiences.

Cliona Lestrangle

Hermione stood in the kitchen, flicking her wand this way and that, preparing breakfast for herself and Sirius. She was up early that morning to do some reading in the library. Her grumbling stomach forced her away from her studying and into the kitchen. Life had finally begun to settle a little and she was able to set a routine for herself. She was concerned about the amount of time she devoted to preparing for her NEWTs. The whirlwind that had been her life over the last several weeks was giving way to something slightly more stable and she was glad of it.

Not that the whirlwind was entirely out of her life. Today she would be taking tea with Cliona Lestrangle at the Lestrangle Manor. She would be in the house that Bellatrix had called home. To say that she was nervous was a bit of an understatement. She only knew little bits and pieces about Cliona that she had picked up from Sirius and others through conversation. It had been made clear that Cliona was no death eater but she was a pureblood and it was likely she had a few prejudices. Hermione wondered what Cliona could have possibly seen in her and wondered if she would be learning more about what the Daughters of the International Warlock Convention's interest in her was.

Hermione heard the bedroom door open and smiled. Sirius was a little grumpier in the mornings lately because when he woke up his wife wasn't in bed with him. He missed their early morning romp together, not that he didn't make up for it at his earliest convenience.

"Good morning. What smells so good?" Sirius walked up behind her and wrapped his arms around her.

"I made omelets." Hermione leaned back into his embrace.

"I missed you this morning." He playfully nipped at her neck before taking a plate into the dining room.

"I was up early, studying." Hermione was about to take her plate into the dining room to join him when she heard a tapping at the window.

Hermione opened it to let the owl in, she gave it a bit of omelet in exchange for a copy of Witch Weekly.

“Wow! I didn’t realize the article would be out so fast.” She took her plate and the magazine into the dining room. Sirius looked up to see what she was talking about and raised his eyebrows in surprise.

“That was fast, wasn’t she hear just a week ago?” Sirius looked at the cover of the magazine Hermione had placed between them.

“ Yeah.” Hermione flipped through the pages of the periodical searching for the interview she had given Betty Braithwaite. She took a distracted bite of her omelet as she searched. “Oh, here it is.”

“Why don’t you eat first...” Sirius chuckled at the slow trek her fork was taking to reach her mouth.

“I can do both.” Hermione gave her food her full attention for a brief moment before returning to the article.

“Well, in that case why don’t you read it out loud.” Sirius felt certain the only way he would get near the magazine was to let her be in charge of it.

Hermione took another quick bite. “Alright.”

“Hermione Black – Innocent Bystander.” Hermione quirked her eyebrow. “Interesting title.”

“Not really, I sort of thought she might paint you as a victim.” Sirius gave her a thoughtful look.

“Victim? Well, I suppose that’s right in a sense. Not the most flattering characterization, though.” Hermione took one last bite of her omelet before turning her full attention to the article.

‘Standing outside of the home of Hermione and Sirius Black one does not get the impression of the immeasurable wealth enjoyed by

the couple. The modest two story in a quiet London suburb is charming and unassuming, much like it's mistress.

I was warmly invited into her cozy home for tea and a bite of cake and was pleasantly surprised to learn that I would be meeting her husband, Sirius Black, as well.'

"I thought she was a bit surprised to see me," said Sirius darkly, suddenly glad he had chosen to stay, not that it had ever been a question.

Hermione gave Sirius a grateful smile and continued to read.

'The handsome, pureblood Heir of the Black line is just as devoted to his young wife as their recent press has suggested. When I asked Hermione about her interaction with the young Malfoy Heir, Sirius was quick to jump to her defense.

"He attacked my wife," he quickly asserted, his darker character emerging to the foreground. It was hard not to remember the numerous wanted posters from his stint on the run from the law. While he was cleared on all charges his reaction stood as a reminder that this was not a man to be trifled with.

What was most interesting about his reaction was the effortlessness with which Hermione put him at ease. The smallest pat of her hand brought forth the charming man the tabloids have come to love.'

Hermione wasn't sure why but Braithwaite's observation caused her to flush slightly. She glanced over at Sirius who seemed to just be figuring something out. He had the unfocused look of someone caught in a realization. Hermione turned her attention back to the article, a little smile playing at her lips.

'I asked Hermione to detail the events between herself and Draco Malfoy. A protective husband, as Sirius Black certainly seems to be, could misinterpret a harmless act as being something more sinister. These were after all students from rival houses at Hogwart's, the interactions could have been nothing more than a few well placed

hexes. Aggravating and irritating to be sure but perhaps not dangerous, strictly speaking. I couldn't have been more wrong.

“My first week back to school Malfoy pushed me down in the hallway, making me fall. Then he pulled me up roughly and shoved me against the wall and called me a common mudblood whore. Then he licked my neck.”

I was absolutely stunned that a son of one of our most respected families could behave in such a low manner. Her story wasn't over however.

“When Professor Dumbledore found out that Malfoy had been harassing me, making crude comments and so forth he required that Malfoy make an apology in order to remain at school.”

I asked her how Lucius Malfoy took the news.

“Oh, he was really angry. You could just see it in his eyes.”

‘I was in for quite a surprise when I learned that the aggressive interchanges Draco Malfoy directed at Hermione forced the Blacks on the run. Persecuted for her status as a muggleborn Hermione Black left England because she was no longer safe.

“When Draco was expelled from Hogwart's for threatening my safety his father was livid. He sent death eater's after me, in Hogsmeade, no less.”

Their story truly puts a spotlight on just how dangerous this deranged pureblood obsession really is. It is heartening to note that in this current climate where muggleborns and purebloods are attempting to break new ground with each other that this dynamic couple is setting the standard. While Hermione and Sirius recounted their harrowing tale I observed the way he pulled her close and how she leaned into him for comfort. If the Heir to the Black line himself and this lovely young muggleborn witch can find harmony then surely there is hope for our society.’

“She certainly saw a lot, didn’t she?” Sirius leaned over in his chair to nuzzle Hermione’s neck. She giggled and swatted him back. She continued to read from the article.

‘There is much more to the tale of these two. Hermione was recently hospitalized in St. Mungo’s under rather mysterious circumstances. I asked Hermione what it was regarding. She became rather quiet and withdrawn and allowed Sirius to do the talking for her.

“For Christmas I wanted to give her an engagement ring. I made my choice from among the Black family’s collection of engagement rings. What I didn’t know was they were cursed against muggleborns. Hermione nearly died.”

I was so touched when Sirius had to take a moment to recover...’

“I did not!” Hermione had to laugh at his look of indignation. “She makes it sound like I broke down and cried in front of a perfect stranger.” She cupped his face with her hand and cooed soothingly to him. She knew what Braithwaite was referring to but would never let him know how close to the surface his emotions were showing that day. She gave him one last glance, smiling at the slight pout, before returning to her reading.

“Let’s see, where was I...” Hermione looked for her spot.

“You can skip right over any discussion of my ‘moment to recover,’” he grumbled, giving the magazine an irritated look.

“Right. Okay...moment to recover...ah, here we are.” Hermione found the place where she had left off.

‘I asked Hermione what affect the curse had on her.

“I was there a week before Severus Snape was able to contain the curse. He kept the curse from killing me.”

“Come to think of it have we ever thanked Professor Snape?” Hermione paused in her reading. After she got her memory back, everything was a bit of blur for the rest of the afternoon. She realized in horror that they had never actually thanked Snape.

“I did,” said Sirius quietly. “While you were still in a lot of danger. You were pretty out of it and wouldn’t remember.”

“Yes, but I haven’t. That’s just awful of me.” Hermione had a horror struck look on her face.

“Well, you can remedy that.” He gave her a smile of reassurance, hoping she wouldn’t beat herself up over this.

Hermione sighed and nodded, putting it at the top of her mental list of things to do. She turned her attention back to the article. “Let’s see...hmmm...contain the curse, oh, here I am.”

‘Hermione went on to detail that Severus Snape, Hogwart’s Professor, kept the curse from killing her by setting up a magical barrier to contain it. The barrier was itself damaging to Hermione resulting in a catastrophic loss of memory. I caught up with Severus Snape in Hogsmeade to ask him about the Toujours Pur curse.

“The intent behind the curse is to keep pureblood families free of halfblood children. No muggleborn witch could ever wear a family ring. I was rather amazed that Black would offer such a ring to a witch he professes to care so much about.”

Hermione glanced over at Sirius whose expression had gone to stone. She reached over to him, placing her hand atop his.

“Don’t do that. You’ve got to quit torturing yourself over this.” She give his hand a squeeze.

Her touch and her voice reached him, he glanced at her, the guilt still written so plainly on his face. He tried to smile but it came across as more of a grimace. “Finish reading the article,” he said quietly.

Hermione paused, unable to tear her attention away from him. She hated that he was hurting, that he couldn't find a necessary bit of forgiveness for himself. "I forgive you. You know that, don't you?" Her gaze felt like a spotlight on his shame. He really wished she would just go back to reading the article.

"I know, thank you, baby. It means so much to me that you do. Now come on, I know you're never going to let me have that magazine, read to me, please." His voice was soft and low with a slight catch, it spoke of just how close to the surface his emotions were. Hermione suddenly realized that her reassurances were only hurting him more. She turned her attention back to the magazine.

'I asked Severus Snape what could break the curse's hold over Hermione.

"Pregnancy. Black got her with child thus breaking the curse's hold over her."

When talking about their unexpected bundle of joy Hermione and Sirius positively lit up.'

"We're expecting!" said Hermione excitedly.'

Hermione paused to sneak a look at Sirius who had visibly relaxed, a small smile was threatening at the corner's of his mouth.

'My final question to Hermione was regarding the rumor that the Daughters of the International Warlock Convention had taken an interest in her.

"Well, I've been invited to attend one of their meetings," she told me. "I'm not at all sure what they want to talk to me about."

And so my interview concluded with a mystery as to what the prestigious pureblood only institution could possibly want with the young, muggleborn witch, Hermione Granger Black.'

“I like her a lot better than Skeeter.” Hermione closed the magazine and turned slightly in her chair to face Sirius.

“I thought that went really well, baby. The Daughter’s will know that you have no intention of being quiet about the things that have happened to you. That’s what you want. I know you’re uncertain but I still believe that they want you to join their ranks, although I’m not sure why.” He pushed a tendril of hair out of her eyes.

“Time will tell, maybe I’ll learn something when I talk with Cliodna today.” Hermione got up from the dining room table, taking her plate into the kitchen. She reached for the door that led to basement but was paused by Sirius’ voice.

“Uh, uh.” His eyes raked hungrily over her form. “You owe me.”

“I owe you,” she said, incredulity laced with humor.

“Well, yeah...” He moved slowly toward her, a swagger in his step. She got the fleeting impression of a lion stalking prey. “That’s how I see it.” His voice was low, his tone confident.

Hermione danced away from the door and out of his easy reach. A feral smile was her only warning that a chase was about to commence. She squealed and dashed toward the bedroom with Sirius hot on her heels.

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Hermione sat across from Cliodna Lestrange, smiling nervously, sipping her tea and taking timid bites from the delicious sweets that were on offer. They had already made it through the ‘thank you for inviting me’ and ‘what a beautiful home you have’ and were ready to embark on getting to know one other.

Between sips of tea and bites of scone with clotted cream and raspberry jam Hermione observed Cliodna who was currently explaining her family tree, a source of much pride, apparently. The older woman who was dressed in emerald green robes was from a

particularly unfortunate looking line of people. Here was not the handsome and beautiful line of Black. This was something altogether different. This was stern and imposing in a rather unpleasant way. Hermione could only guess that Bellatrix had chosen Rodolfus for breeding purposes and stayed for the torture and mayhem.

Cliona was younger than Sirius yet still a good bit older than Hermione, a spinster who lived in the family home with her father Romulus. At the Queen Maeve event she had kept herself separate from the ladies on the prowl and stuck to a clique of women who were older than herself. In regaling Hermione in tales of her pedigree the unmentioned Rodolphus and Bellatrix were glaring omissions.

Hermione did not ask why.

“Well, enough about me, tell me Hermione did you ever think you would be so fortunate as to marry into such a fine family?” Cliona had scooted closer to Hermione, the way girlfriends do when discussing matters of the heart.

Hermione was nonplussed by the question, she wasn't sure how to answer that. The intimacy Cliona was assuming vexed her. “Sirius is a wonderful husband. I couldn't be happier.” It was the truth and the closest she could come to answering the question.

“Well, of course you're happy, dear. Quite a feat for someone such as yourself.” Cliona flashed Hermione a genuine smile of friendship and warmth.

Someone such as myself?

Hermione felt a strong wave of annoyance, this woman was talking about her blood status. She didn't seem to think there was anything wrong with the rather rude insinuation that Hermione might not be good enough for Sirius. The weird thing was that she didn't seem to be trying to hurt Hermione. Quite the opposite, despite her words she was warm and friendly toward Hermione. Her tone held genuine affection which was both premature and confusing.

“Erm...I’m not sure what you mean by that Cliodna.” Hermione kept the annoyance out of her voice, she wanted the opportunity to understand the other woman before tipping her hat.

“Please, it’s Clio to all my friends.” Cliodna paused to smile before continuing on. “So, well, as I’m sure you know, a muggleborn has never married a Black Heir before. That family has had its share of blood traitors over the years but never the Heir.” Cliodna’s tone was light and friendly, as though she hadn’t just said something astonishingly rude. “I suppose it makes sense for Sirius. He’s never really embraced his heritage.”

Hermione popped a bite of scone in her mouth to hide the look of bewilderment. Cliodna seemed to be completely oblivious to Hermione’s discomfort and irritation .

“You know I read that article this morning, the one in Witch Weekly. Just scandalous about Draco Malfoy, such low behavior.” Cliodna took a sip of her tea. “For a muggleborn you certainly seem to attract the attention of quite a few prominent men.”

“What?” Hermione set her tea down, her outrage surfacing. Cliodna seemed to finally sense that she had said something wrong.

“I guess I’m just surprised that Sirius didn’t want to handle the situation in a more civilized manner and to go public with it...tsk, tsk.” Cliodna sweetly chided the behavior of Sirius.

“Clio, do you dislike me?” Hermione looked Cliodna straight in the eye, searching for some sign that the other witch understood her offence.

“Why, no. I think you are simply charming. What would ever give you the impression that I didn’t like you. I’ll have you know I’m working very hard to get you a seat among the Daughter’s.” Cliodna looked aghast that Hermione would consider her any less than a true friend. “Are you feeling well, Hermione? Pregnancy getting you down? Any leftover effects from that dreadful ring?”

“Yes, I feel fine.” Her words came out a bit more clipped and snappish than she intended. Hermione took a deep breath to steady herself, when she spoke it was with a bit of forced calm in her voice. “It’s just some of the things you say...about my blood status.” Hermione’s voice betrayed her perplexed state.

“Oh, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to hurt your feelings. I never considered how embarrassed you must be.” Cliodna took on an air of sympathy and understanding.

“Embarrassed?” Hermione wasn’t sure what Cliodna meant.

“Well, aren’t you?” Now it was Cliodna’s turn to be confused. “I mean think about it, if your baby is a boy the next Heir will be a halfblood.”

“Clio, I’m quite proud of my muggle heritage and my child will be as well.” Hermione drew herself up, her chin raised in defiance.

Cliodna took in a sharp breath of air. “Well, you are the genuine article, aren’t you?” There was something patronizing about Cliodna’s mien mixed in with admiration. “I like you, Hermione, I really do! You’ve got pluck!”

“Why do you want me to sit on the Daughter’s?” Hermione was beginning to understand Cliodna. The older witch couldn’t help her prejudices but she was nevertheless somewhat intrigued with Hermione because she was muggleborn. Hermione was an oddity in Cliodna’s over privileged pureblood sphere but one that she was trying to embrace.

“Well...you are married to a Black, the Black Heir, no less, even if you are muggleborn...” Hermione couldn’t help but feel that Cliodna was holding something back.

“I don’t understand, Clio. I don’t exactly meet your membership requirements.” Hermione observed Cliodna with a small frown.

“Well, that’s the good news. We’re willing to overlook it due to your marriage.” Cliodna spoke as though Hermione we’re the luckiest witch alive.

Overlook?

Hermione sighed and shook her head. “I’m just not so sure this is for me, Clio.”

The shock was evident on Cliodna’s face, she had never considered that Hermione might refuse. “Oh, no, you just have to join. I’ve been working so hard for you.”

“I think it might be a mistake, Clio.” Hermione was suspicious of Cliodna’s motives for wanting her among the Daughter’s. She absolutely would not give an indication that she was considering the offer.

“At least come to the meeting, then decide.” Cliodna’s tone held a petulant whine.

“Let me think about it. Listen, I promised to meet Sirius in Diagon Alley, I better get going. Thank you for the lovely tea.” Hermione stood to leave, she was ready to get away. The afternoon with Cliodna had been unsettling for her. She was looking forward to doing some work on their upcoming ceremony.

“So soon?” Cliodna looked disappointed. “No matter, we’ll go together. It’ll be nice to see Sirius.”

Hermione gazed dumbly at Cliodna for a moment, for a fraction of a second she thought she had made her escape. “Oh, uh, sure. That would be lovely.” Hermione hoped she sounded convincing.

“We’ll travel by floo.” Cliodna showed Hermione the crystal box she kept the floo powder in. “After you, Hermione.” One after the other the two witches disappeared in a whirl of green flames.

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Cliona and Hermione walked slowly past the shops, peering in windows and making comments on things they liked. Hermione was still not sure what to make of Cliona. To make matters worse, the article had created quite a buzz about her. People she didn't know and had never met called out to her in friendly greeting like they were old acquaintances. One witch even asked for her autograph.

The two witches walked into a little magical curio shop and made observations to each other on the things they found interesting. Hermione turned when she heard a voice she recognized. She looked around the corner of the aisle she was on and groaned. Lyra Edgecomb.

Bollocks!

Cliona caught Hermione's look of distress and followed her eyeline. "Oh, you don't know her, do you?" Cliona spoke like she had something foul in her mouth.

"Only that she fancies my husband," growled Hermione, looking daggers at the blond witch.

"Oh, I could tell you stories about that one." A look of surprise suddenly flashed across Cliona's face. It had just occurred to her that Sirius had a starring role in some of those stories. She changed the topic slightly. "She's been trying to get on the Daughter's for years now, actually turned in an application." Cliona snorted, clearly amused by what she had just said.

Hermione didn't get the joke but was laughing a little only because Cliona was. "Why is that funny?"

"Because, silly...no one applies to the Daughter's, only selected. We come to you, not the other way around. She's a bit of joke, that one." Cliona flashed an evil smile at Hermione and stepped into Lyra's sight.

Lyra seized on the opportunity to lobby Cliodna instantly. "Oh, hello, Clio, how are you?" Lyra rushed over to Clio's side. "Those robes are just sumptuous, where ever did you find them?"

"Lyra, darling, what are you up to these days?" Cliodna gave Lyra a smile so sweet it was sickening.

"Oh, you know...still waiting to hear back from the Daughter's. Have you heard anything?" Lyra looked at Cliodna the way a dog does its master.

"Nothing yet, Lyra, but I'll keep my ear to the ground for you. Say speaking of membership, I have someone I want you to meet." Cliodna beckoned Hermione forward. "We're working very hard to get this young lady to join our number. Can you believe she actually told me she'd have to think about it?"

Hermione was appalled at the cruelty with which Cliodna was treating Lyra. She didn't like Lyra but this was abhorrent behavior. Hermione walked reluctantly forward and prepared herself for Lyra's reaction. She wasn't disappointed, she looked away, unable to bear the hurt and humiliation on Lyra's face.

"Oh, wow...you...really?" Lyra was unable to form a coherent sentence. She was fighting to maintain her composure and not lose it right there in front of Cliodna. When she spoke there was a waver in her voice. "That's wonderful news, how nice for you."

Lyra was devastated, she was a pureblood who had a family member on the Daughter's and yet she still couldn't break through. Hermione was a muggleborn who seemed to waltz into everything Lyra wanted for herself.

"I haven't said yes." Hermione's tone was apologetic.

"Well, I'd better be going, see you ladies later." A thoroughly defeated Lyra walked off in the direction of the Leakey Cauldron.

Hermione rounded on Cliodna. “I can’t believe you made me a part of that!”

“I thought you disliked her.” Cliodna was affronted by Hermione's behavior.

“That’s beside the point, that’s a human being!” Hermione’s voice was starting to raise, adopting a shrill quality.

“If you’re going to be one of us you need to toughen up.” Cliodna grabbed Hermione roughly by the arm, her friendly, warm character slipped off and was replaced by something much colder.

“I’m NOT one of you!” Hermione threw off Cliodna and stormed out of the shop to find Sirius.

[illegible]

A/N: Thank you for the reviews!

I am a little embarrassed to say this but...I have no idea how I develop my characters. My writing is very instinctual, if it feels right then it must be right, is sort of how that one works. I don't have a formula or whatever it is other writer's do. I do this because its fun and only because its fun. I have no aspirations to be a published writer. It's just not a part of my five year plan. Smile.

Rita Skeeter

NC17

Hermione sat relaxed into Sirius, they were in their family room, drinking tea and talking with Rita Skeeter. Hermione had forced Rita to sign a document against defaming her in any manner. It didn't matter to Hermione how many promises Skeeter had made to Sirius, Hermione didn't trust her as far as she could throw her. Actually, it was a good deal less than that.

Rita had been harboring a suspicion about the marriage for some time. What little she knew of Hermione didn't mesh with the great deal she knew of Sirius. Ever since that day in the ministry she had been pondering the complexity of this particular twosome. When Sirius returned her correspondence saying they wanted to come clean about the marriage, to set the record straight, well...to say she had been salivating would be polite.

Now that the interview was near its completion she saw these two people in a completely different light. She would never have thought Sirius capable of such a selfless act. Her career had focused on only one aspect of his personality and it was a rather selfish one at that. Hermione she had only pity for, completely against her will, she rather enjoyed disliking the girl.

"I really only have one question left," said Rita, looking at Hermione over her garish glasses. "And that is whether or not the Daughter's have extended their invitation to you yet."

"You say that like you expect them to." Hermione narrowed her eyes at Rita, wondering what the other witch knew that she didn't.

"Of course I expect them to, they have to really, to save their hides." Rita smiled widely giving Hermione a perfect view of her gold teeth.

"Save their hides?" Sirius raised an eyebrow in doubt.

“Oh, yes. They’re very close to quite a bit of hot water. That law that caused you a spot of bother had Narcissa Malfoy’s fingerprints all over it. It actually started with her, Lucius ran with it once it wormed its way into the ministry.” Rita smirked at Hermione’s shocked expression. “There’s more too, darker and nastier I suspect, with that bunch that’s been in charge for so long now.”

Hermione took a deep breath. “I had tea with Cliodna Lestrangle.”

“Piece of work, that one. She’ll smile at you while stabbing you in the back. Mind you watch out for her.” Rita examined her nails while she waited for Hermione to continue.

“Yes, that’s exactly it. She said all these horrible things to me while acting like we were best girlfriends or something. She said had been working very hard for me, to get me on the Daughter’s.” Hermione had moved forward in her seat and was gesturing with her hands. Sirius sat back to keep out of her way.

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“Seeing how far she could push you, see what you were made of, I imagine. She wanted to know if she can control you or not.” Rita took her glasses off and put one end in her mouth. “They need you, Hermione but you are a calculated risk to them. They deal in influence but if they are completely discredited then they have very little influence to peddle. So...when do you say yes?”

Hermione ignored the question. “How can they even get me on, with that bylaw of theirs?”

“Loophole that involves your last name. Not all of those family names are deemed equal, some were set above the others. There is a chair in their chambers which has the Black crest on it and can only be sat by a Black or the wife of a Black. The last Black to sit there was Bellatrix but seeing as she’s in Azkaban now...” Rita trailed off, eyeing Hermione closely. “So, I’ll ask again, when are you going to say yes?”

“Haven’t decided if I will say yes,” said Hermione. She had a lot of information to digest.

“You’re considering turning it down? That would be rather foolish of you.” Rita looked at Hermione with surprise.

“Why is that?”

“Influence, dear. There are very few pro muggleborn laws, you have far less rights than you know. You could change some of that.” Rita put her glasses back on.

“I actually do know, the laws are very one sided in favor of purebloods.” Hermione sat back with a small huff.

“Well, think it over. Don’t sit on the sidelines just because you don’t like some of the players.” Rita put her Quill back in her bag. “I better be off.” They all three stood, Sirius walked Rita to the door.

“Kick her into play,” whispered Rita under her breath.

“Bye, Rita.” Sirius gave her a smile that hid what he might be thinking of her comment and shut the door after her.

Sirius knew that Hermione would need some time to think about what she had just learned. Instead of pulling her into a discussion he announced that he needed to meet with Remus. Hermione nodded taking note of the fact that he suddenly looked very excited about something.

“I need to study, anyway.” Hermione gave him a bemused expression, he looked a bit like he was afraid she might tell him he couldn’t leave.

Hermione walked over to him with a quizzical look wondering why he wouldn’t meet her eyes. To cover for it Sirius pulled her into a passionate kiss that left her dizzy and breathless. Satisfied that she wasn’t going to ask any questions he darted out the door as fast as he could.

Hermione shook her head and laughed and walked back to the bedroom to change into something more comfortable.

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Hermione lay stretched out on her new chaise lounge in the library, reading quietly. She had thought it was a rather silly thing to have in a library but Sirius was worried about her wellbeing in the coming months. His explanation for the purchase was that it looked comfortable. The strong visual image of Sirius Black trying out a chaise was one that would send her into a fit of giggles every time. Every gesture such as this filled her with warmth and happiness she never knew was possible. Hermione looked up and over her book when she heard the door to the basement open, a moment later she heard Sirius tromping down the stairs. She smiled brightly from her reclined position on the ridiculous couch.

Sirius looked at Hermione smiling up at him and completely forgot why he had come down here. She was wearing those impossibly tiny shorts of hers, the third button on her blouse had accidentally come undone revealing the swell of her cleavage. Her unruly hair was spread out like a dark halo behind her, one leg was bent up, the other dangled off the couch. She was peering at him innocently from over her book.

Sirius swallowed a knot in his suddenly dry throat and then fidgeted in his newly uncomfortable pants. He shook himself mentally, recovered, slightly, and sauntered closer to her, choosing his method of attack.

“Hey,” she greeted, wondering why he hadn’t said anything.

Sirius smiled and cleared his throat, his eyes sweeping across her displayed form. He reached the chaise and slid in behind her, the large couch easily fitting them both. He danced his fingers along her bent leg, beginning with her feet and ending at the bottoms of her shorts.

“If you want to get anything done down here, you probably shouldn’t wear these.” His husky baritone sent an electric thrill through her body.

“Why is that Mr. Black?”

“Because it is unlikely you will get to wear them for very long.” In one swift movement he had the shorts off her body, Hermione yelped in surprise.

Sirius threaded one arm around her body, using his free hand to toss her book aside and undo the remaining buttons. Instead of removing her blouse he simply opened it to reveal her creamy mounds and rosy peaks. He stroked his palm across her chest, grazing his thumb across both nipples, Hermione sighed into his touch.

He nibbled and sucked along her neck, pulling her body close and pressing his pelvis into her so she could feel his trapped hardness. He slid his fingers into the side of her knickers and slipped one into her heat. Hermione called softly out to him.

“ You like that, don’t you, baby?” Sirius added a finger and massaged her sensually.

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Hermione moaned in response, he pumped in and out of her slowly. She thrust herself against his hand, panting and mewling as his thumb grazed across her clit.

“I need you, Sirius...”

Sirius pulled his fingers out of her, giving them a lick and letting her see him do so. Her eyes widened slightly even as she gave a frustrated groan at the loss of him. He flicked open the button on his pants and pulled down the zipper. He disrobed only as much as needed to free his erection. He parted her thighs and moved her knickers to the side again and pushed into her slowly, inch by agonizing inch. “Hurts so good, Sirius,” her voice was rough,

sounding almost pained as she panted out her praise to him. "Every time...oh, god..."

"You love my cock, don't you, baby?" Sirius pumped his pelvis into her slowly, loving the feel of her tight, wet sleeve enveloped around him. Their bodies moved together slowly, rhythmically, dancing together in perfect harmony. Sirius fought against himself to take her too fast. "Sirius," she whined, knowing full well he would tease her anyway. He loved to drag the pleasure out for the both of them, to drive them both crazy with wanting their release. He listened to her begging, letting it excite him more, making him thrust a little faster, a little harder.

It wasn't long before his easy pace in their languid position wasn't enough for him. He needed something different, wanted more of her, all he could reach. Sirius pulled out and sat up, Hermione whimpered in protest. He roughly pulled one her legs flush against his body, her ankle over his shoulder and reentered, the new position allowing him to put his full length inside of her. He hit bottom and grinned when she called out to him in pleasure. He used her leg as leverage while bracing with his on the floor to piston himself brutally in and out, over and over. His thumb grazed lightly along her clit, sending chills of pleasure through her as he took her higher and higher with him.

Hermione watched him awestruck, he was a heavenly sight to behold, the picture of masculine grace and power. Every muscle in his body was flexed, his chest heaving like a racehorse, his mouth hanging open to take in more air. She braced herself against the high backed front of the chaise and just let herself feel as he took her. He cocked his head to the side, his eyes locked to where they were joined as he threw his pelvis with jackhammer force. He looked up to see her watching as he feasted on her young body, the pupils blown in her hungry eyes.

"I love fucking you, baby."

Sirius felt her tighten around him, calling to him, her face frozen in pleasure. Sirius rode her orgasm and found his own completion, moaning her name in ecstasy.

“Sirius? Hermione? Are you...oh my god...I’m so sorry!” Ginny scampered back up the stairs.

Hermione struggled to catch her breath, trying to grasp what just happened, her mind still clouded and hazy. “Ginny, its her weekend.” She hastily fastened the buttons on her blouse.

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“I left the door to the basement open, I actually came down here to remind you that everyone was coming over today.” Sirius chuckled at himself as he zippered and buttoned his pants. “The rest of them will be here in about an hour.”

Hermione hopped one legged into her shorts and ran out of the library, glaring at Sirius who was hanging back, pretending to be interested in her forgotten book. She found Ginny in the family room, smirking at her as she entered.

“I see you two are up to your usual tricks.” Ginny never had any problems teasing Hermione.

“I’m really sorry, Ginny.” Hermione was red faced, not quite able to meet Ginny’s eyes.

Ginny waved her hand dismissively. “Nothing I haven’t seen before,” she said, continuing her torture with a sly grin. She looked Hermione up and down. “Hadn’t you better change?”

Hermione looked up at the grandfather clock and squealed, she dashed off to the bedroom without a backward glance. Ginny sauntered into the kitchen and perused what Hermione and Sirius had on hand and began to make sandwiches and cut cake into squares. The basement door opened, Sirius gave Ginny a guilty smile. Ginny said nothing about what she had witnessed, instead she put him to work.

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Laughter filtered down from the family room into the library, five men looked at each other bemusedly, each wondering what they had gotten themselves into. Sirius cast a nervous glance at the basement door before daring to enjoy the cigar in his fingers. If he were caught, he'd be a dead man and he knew it.

"You enjoy flirting with danger, don't you?" Bill baited him whilst a great smoke ship left his lips.

"He does more than flirt with her, Bill." Fred stepped into the game that Bill started.

Sirius took a sip of his firewhiskey, pointedly ignoring their goad.

"You don't know the half of it," said Remus. "Ask Sirius what he bought today."

"Alright," said George. "Sirius, pray tell, what did you buy today?"

A great grin spread across Sirius' face. "Gents, today I bought myself a new motorbike."

"Now ask the great, dirty coward where he's keeping it." Sirius shot Remus a death glare.

"I want it to be a surprise."

Another peal of laughter filtered down from upstairs, five pairs of eyes looked at the ceiling as if it had any answers.

"Any takers for how long that is going to stay friendly?" George waggled his eyebrows, sincere about his offer.

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"Why wouldn't it stay friendly?" Remus was genuinely confused.

“I got this one.” Sirius turned to his friend. “Five witches are upstairs picking out one bridesmaid dress for all of their weddings. They all have their own ideas and each will want it her way. This will not end well.”

“So? Why can’t they do that and stay friendly?” The picture wasn’t getting any clearer for Remus.

Bill shook his head. “Put me down for Fleur, if I know her she’s throwing the first hex.” He tossed fifty galleons at George.

“I don’t think so, mate. Fleur may start it but Hermione will finish it,” said Sirius confidently, laying down his fifty as well.

“Sure about that?” George was writing all of this down.

“Absolutely,” grinned Sirius. “My witch is pregnant, hormones!”

“Should we really be taking bets on this?” Remus tried to be the voice of reason in a room full of scoundrels. He was patently ignored.

“Back to this motorbike of yours, why does it have to be a surprise?” Fred put his cigar to his lips and pulled on it, releasing a lovely smoke dragon.

“We’re taking it on our honeymoon.” Sirius was rather pleased with his grand idea. “When I’m all done with her, she’ll fly, literally.”

Fred choked on his firewhiskey. “I’ve never been to a wedding and a funeral, should be interesting.” He continued to cough from the burning liquid that had invaded his lungs.

“You know she hates to fly, right?” George was fairly certain he had never met a bigger fool, he felt honored to be a witness.

“She hates to fly on brooms and hippogriffs,” corrected Sirius, “she’s never been on a flying motorbike.”

“You’re really not that good a liar. He’s hiding it because he doesn’t want her to tell him no.” Remus snickered at Sirius’ apprehension.

“Well, we better enjoy you while we’ve still got you,” said Fred, rubbing his hands together excitedly. “Your stag party is first, then?”

“Me? Oh, we’ve been married six or seven months now, I can’t have a stag party, can I?” Sirius looked a little dejected at his own words.

“It wouldn’t be a proper wedding unless the groom was hung over, would it? Especially considering he’d be you.” Remus took a sip of his firewhiskey and raised an eyebrow in challenge.

“She’s not gelded you yet, has she?” Bill chimed in with Remus.

-

“I offer the fact that she’s pregnant as evidence to the contrary.” Sirius took mock offence to Bill’s provocation.

“I owe it to James to get you as drunk as you got him.” Remus smiled fondly at the memory of James and Lily’s wedding.

“Lily was always frightening when she was angry, I’m just lucky that hex missed me.” Unconsciously Sirius took an edgy glance at the ceiling.

“So you’re not nervous then? I suppose it’s a little late for cold feet.” Bill gave Sirius a look of sympathy at being the first on the chopping block.

“Well, not about the marriage but the wedding, yeah, I think I am. I had no idea this was such serious business.” Sirius hadn’t given much thought to what went into a wedding. Now that he was living it, the pressure was on, so to speak. “We’re having the ceremony in her parent’s church, we have to get a muggle marriage license or the minister won’t go through with it.”

Suddenly there was a loud bang from upstairs and a shrill cry with a French accent.

“Told you!” Bill vanished his cigar and the smoke that came with it and took off for the stairs.

“He’s joking, right?” Remus looked from Sirius to the retreating form of Bill Weasley.

George and Fred ran up the stairs with identical wicked grins.

Sirius cleared the air with his wand and vanished the cigars and ashtrays. He was in too much of a hurry, leaving a lingering smell of cigar in the library. He dashed up the stairs after the other three leaving a somewhat disbelieving Remus to make up his own mind.

[illegible]

A/N: Thank you for the reviews!

Hermione does not have a brother.

Please review!

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Daughters of the International Warlock Convention of 1289

Hermione patted the niffler that was perched in her lap, it completely ignored her wedding band and engagement ring which was rather odd. Hermione was listening to her hostess as she explained, in detail, why Sirius Black was the most desirable wizard in England. Hermione wanted to ask her hostess a question, she had almost asked her question at least a dozen times now. The pauses in speech did not allow quite enough time for Hermione to interject. Hermione agreed with the other witch, wholeheartedly, who had given this a great deal of thought and it was beginning to annoy Hermione. Hermione decided she had waited long enough, she was just going to have to butt in.

“So, Lyra, why exactly did you and Sirius stop dating?”

Lyra stood angrily, her face red and contorted with rage, she opened her mouth to speak and let out a sound remarkably similar to their doorbell.

“What?”

Lyra opened her mouth, once again the only sound she emitted bore an uncanny likeness to the doorbell.

“Hermione...doorrrrr.” Sirius had entered the room and was pushing against her shoulder, a little roughly and carelessly.

“Cut it out, Sirius.”

Sirius opened his mouth to speak, instead of his voice she heard their doorbell, three times, in rapid succession.

Hermione snuggled into Sirius' warm body only to have him push her toward her side of the bed. “The door, Hermione,” he said sleepily. “Go answer the door.” He gave her another shove toward the edge of the bed.

Hermione slowly sat up, she gave him a cross look, yawned and then stretched. She rubbed her eyes and slowly swung her legs over the side of the bed, first one and then the other. She slipped her feet into the furry black slippers that resembled Padfoot, her Christmas present from Remus. Hermione rose to her feet and shuffled toward the door, nearly stepping on Crookshanks tail. She grabbed her house robe, slipped into it and opened the bedroom door. Before she could close it behind her the doorbell rang again, Hermione walked past the dining room and picked up her wand, eyeing the door and deciding on an appropriate hex. She reached the front door, flicked her wand at it, stifling a yawn as it opened. Their visitor was a young wizard, just a couple of years older than herself, dressed in light grey robes bearing a logo in bright lilac and soft pink.

“Good morning, ma’am. I’m from Silkson and Chiffmore, I’m here to deliver the dresses you ordered from us.” The delivery wizard eyed her wand nervously, her irritated features doing nothing to put him at ease.

“Silkson and Chiffmore? Oh...” Hermione’s lips curved into a pleased smile. “The bridesmaid dresses?”

Hermione jumped lightly, a pair of large, strong hands had just rested on her hips. She felt warm breath against her neck just before a pair of lips nuzzled against her skin. “What’s taking so long?” Sirius had woken fully, grumpy that she wasn’t in bed with him. The fact that he had practically shoved her out was forgotten entirely.

“I-I believe so.” The delivery wizard stammered in the presence of Sirius. Whether it was his former status of convicted felon or his current celebrity status was unclear. Sirius jerked his head in non committal greeting before turning away and into the house. Hermione stepped away from the door to allow him entrance into their home. She conjured a hook on the wall and watched as he hung them up. He glanced briefly at his clipboard before returning his attention to Hermione. “The gold has already been taken from your account so unless there is anything else I can do for you, I’ll be off.”

“No, thank you so much. You wouldn’t believe what I had to do to get them.” Hermione glanced eagerly at the gowns.

Her answer forced the delivery wizard’s eyebrows up in surprise, he immediately schooled his expression into something much more polite. “If there are any problems just send us an owl.” He walked back to the front door and let himself out.

Hermione controlled herself just long enough for him to shut the door behind him. She squealed excitedly, rushed into the dining room and quickly wrote two letters, one to Ginny, the other to Tonks. Sirius glanced at the dresses which were hanging from the wall in the entry way, he couldn’t help the self satisfied grin, remembering the fifty gold he had won off of Bill. Hermione gave Mercury, their post owl, the two letters and sent him on his way.

“Sirius, I’m going to study, will you let Tonks and Ginny know where I am?” She walked up to him and stood on her toes to reach up and kiss him. He made a frustrated sound of protest, he had other ideas for her time.

“I’ll make it up to you.” She smiled shyly and looked away.

“Do you mean what I think you mean?” He pulled her against his heating form, speaking seductively in her ear.

Hermione giggled softly. “Mmm hmm.” She pulled away slowly, looking any where but into his eyes.

“Really...” Sirius shifted slightly in place, he pulled her once more against his body, roughly and pressed his pelvis into her so she could feel his desire. A little sigh escaped her which brought a flush to her cheeks. “I may have to hold you to that.” He kissed a spot on her neck and then grazed his teeth against the skin. She shivered involuntarily, her resolve slipping, thoughts of the library fleeing in the direction of the bedroom. Sirius released her suddenly, satisfied she would be in agony, just like him. He walked over to the pantry and searched for something to make breakfast with.

He pretended to be consumed with his task, glancing over at her as she moved away from him and toward the door to the basement. The moment she opened the door, he flicked his wand at her, quickly turning back to the pantry. Hermione paused, she turned to look at him but he appeared to be fully occupied with his self appointed task. She could have sworn she felt a spell hit her. Sirius sweated each second she stood there, knowing full well if he looked her in the eye he would not be able to hold his laughter in. If she caught him, he would be in trouble on a variety of levels. He could practically feel her eyes boring into his back.

Hermione couldn't detect his guilt and she was trying her damndest to flush him out. The fact that he was still occupied with the pantry was a slight give away. He had been acting suspiciously over the last week, she strongly suspected him of bad behavior but she hadn't been able to catch him at it yet. She finally turned back toward the basement door and slowly descended the steps to her library. When she stepped fully into the library she inhaled deeply, trying to get another whiff of the strong smell she couldn't define. She smelled nothing at all, not even the books which had a unique smell that she loved. Lately when she came down here, her sense of smell failed her completely.

Sirius believed it had something to do with her pregnancy, he had explained that magical pregnancies were different from muggle ones. He didn't seem surprised at all that sometimes she couldn't smell anything. Apparently Lily had experienced something similar from time to time. Her sense of hearing would leave suddenly and unexpectedly, sometimes not returning for days on end.

Sirius was rather amused by his little joke.

Hermione had received a number of books on pregnancy from both Molly Weasley and her mother. She had read them all, cover to cover, but could find nothing about sensory loss. She added her question to her list of things to ask at her next check up.

What she didn't know was that Sirius was lying to her and was pranking her to keep her from smelling the result of his transgression in the library. He had been in the process of removing the odor when

she descended the steps. She had gotten a strong whiff of it before he was able to spell away her sense of smell. He had not yet been able to get down there to finish the job and was rather enjoying living just a little bit dangerously.

Hermione gave up trying to detect the rather obnoxious odor and settled herself on a couch, pulled a few textbooks out of her book bag and continued her preparation. Her NEWTs were only a few months away now and she could feel the beginnings of anxiety, worried she wouldn't be well prepared. She had about an hour to study after which she would be joined by Tonks and Ginny for more wedding planning. Later on that evening she would be attending her first meeting of the Daughters of the International Warlock Convention of 1289. She cherished the time that she studied, it kept her on a schedule, bringing order to her rather busy life.

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Sirius ascended the stairs, heading towards one of the upstairs bedrooms. He was trying to remember where he left his tool kit, for some weird reason he thought it might be up here. It had been so many years ago that he had last used the kit, his memory was a bit fuzzy. He had a lot of work to do on the bike. He and Remus had mapped out even more charms than were on his last bike. He knew that Hagrid had his old bike and was loath to take it from him. Besides, the old bike held too many memories for him. He and James used to go riding on it, piss drunk, in the time between graduation and marriage. James had lived here with Sirius during that time, a few months of wild partying away from the eyes of his parents and Lily. Sirius reached the landing and took a ragged breath, bracing himself to enter James' room.

He knew he would have to come up here sooner or later and address his past, deal once more with the passing of his best friend, his brother. His eyes landed on the last door on the left, he slowly placed one foot in front of the other. He wasn't sure if James had left anything up here or if he had taken it all with him to Godric's Hollow. He half hoped, half dreaded finding something of James, some memento, maybe something he could give to Harry.

He had never told Harry that the room he stayed in when he visited was the same room his father had stayed in. He had tried but he had never been able to force the words past his lips. Remus had stayed here too, on those nights when he was too drunk to Apparate. His bedroom was the first door on the right, the same room Ron occupied when he visited.

Sirius opened the first bedroom on the left and peered in. This was the only room that had gone completely unused. His eyes scanned the entirely empty room, thinking this was the most appropriate room for the nursery. No past associations, nothing to get over in here. He left the door open and moved further down the hall.

He passed the large open area, it too was completely empty of anything. He looked it over and imagined it full of toys. He and Hermione had been up here together last week, looking it over, planning. Planning had led to kissing, kissing had led to groping and groping had led to things they wouldn't be able to do in here once the baby came.

The little smile created by the recent memory slowly slid off his face once he faced the final door on the left hand side. He passed the bathroom on the right and kept going. He stopped outside the door and closed his eyes, he braced himself for he knew not what and opened the door. He stepped inside the room and looked around. He had seldom been up here, no need really, except for the times that James couldn't manage it on his own.

Everything was just as he remembered it, double bed in an oak frame that had a small headboard, tall dresser, long dresser with a tall mirror and a closet. As he looked around he thought of Harry and how Harry would have no home to go to once school was out. He decided to ask Hermione if Harry could come and live with them after graduation. He knew she would say yes and would be delighted for the company. He still had something to make up to Harry, having burned number twelve, Grimmauld Place to the ground.

Sirius bravely opened the dresser drawers and peered into each one. He found a few shirts he recognized as Harry's but that was all. Nothing scary here. He continued into the room until he reached the

closet door. He took another deep breath and opened the door. The first thing that met his eyes was James' old quidditch uniform. Sirius reached out to touch the fabric, almost afraid to make contact with it. Once he had the tears began to roll down his face, he silently mourned his friend as he sunk to his knees, pulling the uniform with him, forcing it off the hanger.

Sirius let his grief roll over and through him, he had never done this properly. His hunt for Peter had led to his arrest, his arrest had led to the dementors. The dementors kept him focused on the guilt he felt but never actually allowed him to grieve. Grieving would lead to healing and dementors were not in the business of healing anything.

His tears slowed as memories of James flooded through him, happy memories, memories he thought were lost to him forever. A little of the weight that always seemed to press against his heart lifted a bit. He could see his friend laughing and smiling in his mind's eye once again, it was something he never thought he would be able to do again. Sirius lifted his head, his unfocused eyes caught sight of something toward the back of the closet. He stood up and hung the uniform on its hanger, he would give it to Harry the next time he saw him.

He moved into the closet and toward the back. He reached down and found a rusted metal box with a plastic handle, his tool box. He lifted it and as he did so he brushed against another garment, hanging all the way to the back. He pulled it forward along the rack, gasping when he discovered what he had found. He dropped the box and pulled the long black robe off the hanger and exited the closet.

He couldn't believe what he had found. It was his favorite robes, the ones vanity had forced him to buy. James also had these robes, they had gotten them together while shopping with Lily. He had purposely altered them to look a little rougher than they actually were, playing to his bad boy reputation. Lily wouldn't let James rough up his but then James could never quite pull off the same look that Sirius could.

He threw them on, they were a little tighter than he remembered but it only made sense, he was much older now. He must have had a little growing to do, he was just a young pup back then, really. They still fit

well though, despite the slight tightness. He pranced in front of the mirror, looking at himself from every angle. He admired the way the way they hung from his frame. He pulled them closed but shook his head, he preferred to wear his robes open. He opened a few buttons on his shirt and parted the material, showing off his tattoos. He mussed his hair the way he wore it back then, his famous 'just shagged' look.

He remembered fondly the way witches in Hogsmeade would practically flock around him and his bike, wearing these robes. He started to wonder why he hadn't purchased a new bike before now. As he pondered this he realized he didn't believe he deserved a new bike. The last time he had been on his old bike was the night the Potter's had died, an event he believed himself to be responsible for. Ever since that night he had hated himself, held himself in utter contempt and pure loathing. He realized he must have granted himself some measure of forgiveness and wondered when that had happened.

He knew though, in the same moment he asked the question of himself he had the answer. It was her, everything good thing he had or felt or did was a result of her influence. She was this positive force in his life, gently and lovingly making the impossible, possible. He couldn't wait to show her the bike even though he would never be able to explain its significance or tell her just how much she had changed him.

Sirius caught his own eye in the mirror and self consciously realized he'd been primping like a teenager who was stuck on himself. He felt a slight blush rise on his cheeks, he didn't have time to reflect on it though, Hermione was calling for him, it sounded like she was on the stairs. He rushed out of the robes, desperately wanting to never be caught doing what he had just been doing. He threw them into the closet rather hastily and shut the door with a click. He exited the room in a fright, closed the door and rushed into the room the nursery would be in. He was still catching his breath when Hermione walked into the room.

"Hey," she greeted.

“Hey.” He noticed she was dressed rather nicely, she wore a dark blue well tailored dress with a cropped jacket in cream. He leaned into her and kissed her cheek. “You look nice, nervous?”

“Terribly, I’m half afraid they’re going to eat me alive, literally.” Hermione only knew of two members, Cliona Lestrangle and Narcissa Malfoy. Neither name gave her much hope for any enjoyment this evening. Hermione noticed his eyes looked a little red. “Are you alright, your eyes look...”

He cut her off, ignoring her query. “Don’t worry, you’ll be fine, you’re an accomplished witch, just hex their mouths closed if they give you any guff.” He took her hand in his and gave it a squeeze in reassurance.

Hermione knew he was avoiding something but she had learned that there were some parts to him he would never share. She knew it would be senseless to push so she let it go. “Are you thinking about this room for the nursery?” She kept a hold of his hand, hoping to lend him some amount of comfort.

“I was, yeah. What do you think?” He released her hand wrapped an arm around her waist, enjoying the moment of two people who were planning their future.

“I think its perfect, especially since it’s the closest to the stairs. Too bad we don’t have a downstairs bedroom to work with.” She leaned into him as her eyes roamed around the room, picturing it finished and ready for the baby. “Are you still going to Remus’ this evening?”

“I was, yeah. Arthur Weasley owled and asked if he could drop by later on this evening, says he might have some news for me although he gave no indication as to what.” He pulled slightly away so he could see her face.

“Oh, really. I wonder if it has something to do with the ministry?” She smiled when he made a sound she knew meant he couldn’t care less if the ministry wanted something. “Well, I better get going. I’m getting there by floo, so I’ll see you later then?”

“Yeah.” He pulled her in for a kiss and then patted her bottom as she left the room. He held his breath, listening for the unmistakable sound of an activated fireplace. He left the future nursery, leaving the door open and returned to James’ room. He retrieved the tool box and left for Remus’.

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The floo deposited Hermione into an anteroom that was decorated in dark green and silver. The walls were lined with portraits of haughty looking women, all of whom peered at her curiously. The friendliest looking of these portraits spoke to her as she attempted to leave the room.

“Are you the muggleborn?” She looked at Hermione as though she was a curiosity but she did so without malice.

Hermione nodded.

“Good luck, dear.” Curiosity changed to pity. The bees that were buzzing her stomach multiplied.

She left the anteroom and entered a huge chamber, in the middle of this chamber was a massive stone table, cut round and surrounded in chairs. The chairs were high backed, cushioned and had a throne like appearance. A few chairs, though, stood out, larger than the rest. She examined one closely, appreciating the detail to which the craftsman had gone. Beginning with the tail at the floor and ending with the head at the top a long snake wound its way up the chair. She didn’t recognize the crest that was carved into the back of the chair but she did remember what Rita had told her. This must belong to one of those exalted families. She lifted her eyes to the walls, there was more green and more portraits, hundreds of them, covering the walls from top to bottom. She had arrived early, wanting to make a good impression and found herself to be the only one here. The portraits whispered about her as she walked passed, she clearly heard the word ‘mudblood’ coming from more than one of them.

Hermione walked around the room, taking it all in. The light tapping of her foot fall was the only sound in the room. There were several antechambers, all which had fireplaces and more portraits. A set of double doors led to a kitchen where their dinner was being prepared. She wondered how long she would have to wait when she heard something from one of the antechambers. Her eyes narrowed when a face she recognized emerged into the room.

“Hermione, how delightful to see you!” Cliodna hurried over to her, greeting her like she was one of her closest friends. She leaned into Hermione and kissed the air beside her face.

“Hello, Clio.” Hermione was a good deal less enthusiastic than Cliodna. She forced politeness to pass her lips. She was only considering joining this august legion of purebloods, if she agreed she would have to try to get along with women like Clio.

“I didn’t see you at Queen Maeve last week, why not?” Cliodna didn’t seem to register that Hermione was less than thrilled to see her.

“I didn’t even know...” Cliodna cut her off.

“Didn’t know? Well, silly, it’s always the week before a Daughter’s meeting.” Cliodna continued to affect a friendship with Hermione. “Queen Maeve is a Daughter’s endeavor, all profit goes to the various Daughter’s sponsored charities. It is very nearly required that you make an appearance and socialize.”

“I didn’t the Queen Maeve gala belonged to the Daughter’s, interesting. So the Daughter’s are involved in charities?” Hermione saw this night as an opportunity to learn as much as she could about the Daughter’s first hand.

A group of women entered, Cliodna took her by the hand to make introductions. They were clearly here together and seemed to form a tight unit. Hermione recognized the surnames immediately; Rosier, MacNair, Crabbe, Rookwood, Yaxley...the names kept coming, all of them associated with death eaters. They were all very cool with her, looking at like she had garbage smeared across her face. She felt

violated by their looks. She knew they could be in the same predicament as Cliona, guilty by association but essentially harmless.

Other groups came in and were introduced to Hermione, she recognized quite a few names from Hogwarts; Bulstrode, Parkinson, Flint, Bletchly...and on and on. Individual women came in and were introduced, Hermione noticed that if they went to the group associated with death eaters they stayed there and didn't mill about or socialize. That particular group stood tightly together and spoke in low tones, their eyes mostly on her but also on the other groups.

All of the other groups of women were more fluid, they walked around greeting each warmly, going from group to group. None of these women visited the other, now rather conspicuous, group of women. Only Cliona seemed to visit with both which Hermione found rather curious.

Hermione was more than pleased when a face she recognized very well. Minerva McGonagall entered and scanned the meeting hall, smiling when she found what she was looking for, Hermione.

"Good to see you, Hermione. I've missed my star pupil, how have you been?" Hermione felt a flood of relief flow through her, finally a face she knew and trusted.

"Professor McGonagall, I had no idea! It's so nice to see a friendly face." Hermione gushed, holding back the urge to throw her arms around her former professor and hug her tightly.

"It's Minerva, Hermione, from now on." She corrected her gently, reminding her that they stood on equal footing in this environment.

Before Hermione could respond to her another member walked over and made her presence felt.

"How dare you show your face here after what you said about my son." Narcissa Malfoy was seething, her voice a tight, constrained

whisper. Her eyes darted about the hall and then back to Hermione. "You disgrace this hall with your presence!"

"You, Narcissa, are the real disgrace here. Your husbands actions cast a poor light on all of us." Minerva's sharp eyes penetrated through Narcissa's veneer, reducing her outward anger and forcing her to retreat to the safety of the group of death eater's relatives.

There were just too many women for Hermione to remember all of their names. She found a few stood out as familiar and without dangerous associations; Marchbanks, Abbott, Bones, Ollivander, Bagman, Borgin, Burkes...and others.

She was thrilled when three ladies walked in together who she knew, one of whom she would love to get to know; Andromeda Tonks, Madame Rosmerta and Miranda Goshawk. Andromeda hugged her tightly and gave her a pleased smile.

"I wanted you to be surprised. I'm so glad you came!" Andromeda released her, delighted with Hermione's look of surprise.

"I thought they were trying to get me in with that family name clause, how did you get in?" Hermione was surprised to see Andromeda here with her muggle last name.

"Oh, I was inducted before my marriage to Ted. Bellatrix occupied the chair before I came on and once she gone I was a Tonks. There was never any mention of my occupying the chair." Andromeda glanced at one of the large chairs that was close by. Hermione flicked her eyes to the back of the chair and recognized the family crest as belonging to Black.

"So this is my chair?" Hermione walked over and touched the hard, solid wood. She heard a distinct hiss from across the room and flicked her gaze in that direction. Narcissa Malfoy was glaring at her, the red, angry flush visible even from a distance.

"The one and only." Andromeda glanced at Narcissa and patted Hermione reassuringly. "Ignore her."

A light, melodic tinging was heard through out the hall. Hermione watched as the ladies took their seats, when she moved her chair back to sit Narcissa's anger broke out into rage.

"Outrageous!"

"Narcissa your objection has already been noted and overruled." Minerva's clear voice rung out to every corner of the hall. She nodded her head to Hermione who finally sat, nervously, as she tried to settle herself.

Hermione was not prepared for the shock of who sat next to her. She recognized the horrid pink cardigan immediately.

"Hello Miss Granger, so lovely to see you outside of the classroom." Delores Umbridge took her seat next Hermione. Her simpering voice sending a distinct, involuntary reaction of revulsion in Hermione. She loathed this woman like no other.

Hermione opened and closed her mouth a few times, finally opting to go with a curt nod, not trusting the words that might escape her mouth. She quickly turned away, discouraging any future discussion with the former High Inquisitor from Hogwarts.

Hermione endured the meeting which began with dinner and ended with a discussion about herself. The Daughter's were involved in a number of charities; St. Mungo's, Hogwart's scholarship fund, the Society for Distressed Witches and a committee that acted as a liaison with the Ministry of Magic. Each committee had a chair who stood and gave a short report. She learned that her placement was not yet set in stone. They would have a vote at the next meeting provided she indicate her willingness to join. Hermione had been giving that question a great deal of consideration through out her time there.

She had been very close to saying no, she wondered if she could see this through. She wasn't all that welcome but those that she did like, she liked very much. Each of them gave her an encouraging smile,

willing her announce in the affirmative. It was those women who helped her to make up her mind.

“Thank you so much, to all of you, for offering me this wonderful opportunity. Yes, I think I will providing I’m voted in at the next meeting.” In her mind she had a serious doubt as to whether or not that would even happen.

After the meeting Minerva invited Hermione and a few others to tea in her private quarters at Hogwarts. Hermione returned home, her mind filled to bursting with everything that transpired. She wanted to share every minute of it with Sirius. She returned to the antechamber with the fireplace, eager to leave this hall.

She was not prepared for what she returned home to.

“Sirius, really, you need to give this some consideration.” Arthur Wealey was working very hard to control his anger.

“I’ve already told you Arthur, I don’t give a damn if they have restored my hereditary seat on the Wizengamut. I’m not doing it. You can tell those arses at the ministry I said to ‘fuck your mum!’” Hermione took in a sharp, shocked breath of air, Sirius twisted his torso toward her. “Sorry, baby. I didn’t know you were here.”

Hermione sat down on the couch and watched Sirius pace around, fuming mad, glaring at Arthur.

“What about the reparations, will you at least accept that?” Arthur sounded weary, he knew he wasn’t going to make headway with Sirius tonight.

“Fuck that! No way! What they did will never be alright, I don’t need the gold.” Sensing that Arthur was nearing the conclusion of his visit he sat down, resting his hand on Hermione’s thigh, taking comfort in her soothing presence.

Arthur stood up and sighed. "Alright, Sirius. Hermione, its always nice to see you. Molly will be wanting to fuss over you soon." Arthur paused just long enough for Hermione to issue her greeting.

“Good to see you too, Mr. Weasley.” She wasn’t quite able to call him Arthur yet.

Once he had left Hermione and Sirius shared their experiences, taking their comfort in each other, talking late into the night.

[illegible]

A/N: Thank you for the reviews!

Reunion

NC17

Hermione was sat upon the exam table in a small, dingy room in St. Mungo's. The young healer in training assigned to her case that day was being closely supervised by a fully qualified healer. Because her pregnancy had broken the *Toujours Pur* curse the hospital wanted to keep close tabs on her. She was pleased to hear that she and the baby were doing exceptionally well. With the exam completed the healers were fielding her impressive and somewhat daunting list of questions. Hermione had made it to the bottom of the list and really only had one question left.

"I'm experiencing sensory loss, my ability to smell, is there anything you can do for that?" Hermione lowered the piece of parchment upon which her questions were written and looked expectantly at her healers.

"Excuse me? I'm not sure what you mean." The healers looked at each other in question and then back at Hermione.

"Well, my husband told me that my pregnancy is the reason I sometimes lose my sense of smell." Hermione was hoping for a potion or maybe even a simple spell.

"Mrs. Black, your sense of smell has nothing to do with your pregnancy." The healer kept the note of amusement out of her voice.

"Really, because whenever I go into the libr-" Hermione suddenly realized that it was rather odd that she only lost her sense of smell in the basement.

"We could check you over, maybe it's something else." The healer took a step forward.

Hermione held her hand up. "You know," she said, remembering that Sirius had been in the library the first time she lost her sense of smell, "I am far too trusting when it comes to my husband."

“Aren’t we all, honey.”

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Sirius, Remus, Harry and Ron were each being attended by a tailor in Silkson and Chiffmore. It was by far the most popular outfitter of wedding parties and bridal gowns in Hogsmeade. Hermione had already picked out what they would be wearing, this was just the fitting. She would be joining them after her check up at St. Mungo’s so she could have her last fitting. The wedding was next week and the bride was driving everyone nuts with preparation. Most of all Sirius whom she had cut off until the wedding night. His mood was surly being used to a rather steady diet of his favorite activity.

The temptress herself walked in and smiled at the four men who were allowing themselves to be poked, prodded, pinched and pricked in her honor. Sirius felt he deserved something for all the effort he was putting forth. The robes she was wearing open did nothing to hide the jeans, which were slightly tighter with the pregnancy or the small amount of skin she showed with her too short shirt. Sirius let out a little whine of frustration. He had never agreed to such a ridiculous thing and had every intention of wearing her down.

His attendant released him, he fled to Hermione without a glance backward.

“I need to talk to you.” He eyed the large dressing booth, it was as good a place as any.

“I need to talk to you, too.” She was aware of the predatory way in which he was regarding her but she assumed she was safe in such a public arena.

Sirius figured his job was easier than he thought. “We’ll need a little privacy for this.”

“I quite agree.”

Sirius ushered her into the dressing booth, closing the door firmly and fixing the latch. Before she could say a word Hermione found herself pushed roughly against the wall. Sirius had his hands everywhere at once, his mouth working aggressively against her neck. She had planned on asking him about the smell in the library but she was having trouble staying focused.

“Wait!”

“Can’t!”

Sirius had her jeans open and low on her hips, he sensed her resistance so he fought dirty and rubbed circles on her clit with his thumb, two fingers already penetrating her.

“Mmmff.” Hermione tried to stifle the sound, knowing it would only encourage him.

“See? You need this as badly as I do.” He pushed her jeans and knickers down around her knees, his fingers now pumping furiously into her. Hermione had a nagging thought about their location but was having trouble giving a damn, really.

Sirius pulled his fingers out of her long enough to address the issue with her shoes. He pulled them off of her feet, making her stand first on one leg and then the other. Her jeans slipped to her ankles with another rough push against the wall. He pushed her legs apart and dropped to his knees, inhaling deeply of her scent before pressing his face against her sex and finding her clit with his tongue.

“Oh, yes...oh, god...Siriussss.” If it weren’t for his hands at her hips, forcing her into an upright position she would have slipped to the floor under his torture.

Knowing that he had her in exactly the state he wanted her, he pulled his face away and ripped her jeans and knickers off of her body, throwing them carelessly aside. He picked her up easily, pushing her against the wall, pausing long enough to open his fly and release his engorged member. He pushed into her with a grunt and wrapped her

legs around his waist. Having given into him entirely she wrapped her arms around his neck and willingly let him take her.

She was so close already, she knew it wouldn't be long. His long, thick member thrust meatily into her heat, bringing her closer and closer with each hearty plunge.

"So fucking tight, baby." His harsh whisper in her ear, hot breath on her neck.

Sirius felt her quiver around his cock, he knew how close she was. He worried their public location might be making her nervous so he helped her along with his thumb on her clit. Hermione bit down on his neck to stifle the unladylike sound that she was helpless to stop. She shuddered and convulsed around him, his erratic thrusting followed by a surge of warmth let her know she had brought him along with her.

Sirius kissed her neck tenderly as he let her off the wall gently. He sincerely hoped that this would be the end of that nonsense.

"Don't shut me out, baby. I can't take it when you do that." Not that she had ever done it before. He was always able to turn it around to his favor. He was her weakness.

She opened her mouth to protest but he stopped her with a kiss. "Do you really think our love making would be more special by not doing it?"

She wanted to argue but found that she couldn't.

"Alright, I give up. I don't know what I was thinking to be honest." She really wasn't sure what she hoped would be the outcome. Would she be a virgin again? No.

"I think you were probably hoping that a week of abstinence would make up for what was taken from you. But it won't, it never could." She was quite still for a moment, shocked that he had echoed her thoughts so perfectly. The reality of what she wanted and her inability

to ever achieve it overwhelmed her. He pulled her in close, her shoulders shaking. "You want to give yourself to me as a virgin, Hermione but you already have, sweetheart. I cherish that fact more than you know."

And so they stood, her pants discarded on the floor, his low on his hips, her in tears when only moments before they had been taking their pleasure in each other. She had been a little emotional the whole week leading up to the fittings and he had finally figured out why.

"It's not fair!" She was tearful and angry but not at him, never at him and certainly not for this.

"I know, I know...you know in my whole, long life I don't believe a woman has ever been all mine before, just mine. Mine alone." He didn't care that he could hear their friends calling for them, she was all he was concerned with. "You are so precious to me."

She finally felt herself recovered a bit and kissed his cheek. She made to put her clothes on and so he closed his pants and exited. Covering for her while she fully recovered.

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Hermione, Harry and Ron left Silkson and Chiffmore together, talking and laughing, finally able to do some catching up. They had waited patiently for her during her fitting, wanting some time alone with her, together. Their bond was as strong as ever, they missed each other terribly.

Sirius had been shooed away some hours earlier to keep him from seeing her dress. He left with Remus to go work on the bike, unbeknownst to her.

Hermione filled them in on all the things which had been keeping her busy. She told them about how horrible Clidna had been and how odd it was for her to actually feel sorry for Lyra. Ron asked the question that Hermione had been trying to formulate for a few weeks.

“I wonder how many surprises like Lyra he’s got lurking out there.” Hermione stopped dead in her tracks. Ron turned to look at her, slightly puzzled, worried he had offended her, unaware how profound that question was for her.

“I think that is something I’ll need to ask him.” She resumed walking, feeling a little better, a niggling worry fleshed out for her.

“Good luck with that one.” Harry shook his head and gave her a sympathetic smile.

“No kidding. He’s not one to over share, is he?” She loved him as he was but hoped that someday he would let her in a little more.

“I think he’s happy,” said Harry, a little embarrassed to be discussing his godfather’s feelings. “With you, I mean. I think you make him happy.”

Hermione smiled at the shy way in which Harry spoke. “He makes me happy.”

“I would have never guessed it would turn out the way it has but I’m happy for you both.” Ron swung his arm around her for a quick half hug and offered her a grin.

“Thanks, Ron.” It meant the world to her that they were back to normal, all thoughts of romance forgotten, even considered to be laughable at this point.

“How did your check up go?” The curse continued to weigh on Harry’s mind, he didn’t want some measure of it returning, ever.

“Great! Baby’s healthy, I’m healthy. I’m a little thicker around the middle, suppose I’ll have to get used to that.” Hermione patted her belly playfully, taking on a glow as she spoke about her baby. “What about you two? How’s your personal life?”

“Ron dumped Lavendar...” Ron cut Harry off.

“It wasn’t like that, I just couldn’t take her calling me ‘Won Won’ one more minute.” He looked crossly at Harry, his face turning red.

“That was really annoying,” confirmed Harry with a cheeky grin.

“I’m dating Hannah Abbott now, nice girl.” Another beautiful flush which he tried to play off by staring straight ahead.

“And you?” She nudged Harry gently.

“Ginny, all the way.” He smiled confidently, not embarrassed in the slightest.

“I didn’t need to know that much, Harry.” It was her turn to color brightly.

“What? Oh, that’s not what I meant...I mean we haven’t...oh, nevermind.” Harry stumbled over his words, mortified at Hermione’s interpretation. She giggled at her mistake, she knew that Ginny was more than ready, she had made a poor assumption. She decided to change the subject.

“I went to my first Daughter’s meeting.” She threw it out there to see what they would say.

“Really? How’d that go?” Harry pointed to a street sign that read ‘Witch Way.’

“Oh, here we are.” Hermione indicated with a gesture of her hand that they should make a left. “It was interesting...odd collection in their membership.”

“Oh? How so?” Ron quirked an eyebrow up.

“Well, for starters, the last name of every death eater you’ve ever heard of was represented. I have no idea if they themselves were

directly associated or just unfortunate enough to share a last name.” It felt good to talk about this with her boys. She let her frustration show in the edge with which she spoke.

“Right,” said Ron thoughtfully, “you can’t exactly ask, can you?”

Hermione snorted. “Oh yes, I can just imagine that conversation. ‘Are you now or have you ever been a death eater?’”

They all laughed, at first, and then sobered as a unit, realizing just how close to danger she might actually be. The likelihood that some of them were either death eaters themselves or approving of their relations involvement was fairly high. Hermione proceeded to tell them how closely that group had stuck together and that the other members shunned them.

“Narcissa Malfoy was there and oh, she was not pleased to see me.” She detailed the confrontation and the outburst which had come later.

“That worries, Hermione. It’s weird how the ones who were, arguably, in control just a few months ago have lost favor, now.” Harry mused out loud, treating this the way he would any problem that involved death eaters. Much was going on and he felt the need to suss it out.

“Well, Rita mentioned something. She said Narcissa was behind the marriage law and that there was more where that came from. ‘Nastier,’ she said.” Hermione spoke slowly, distracted with her thoughts, carefully considering that bit of information.

“Well, that explains something.” Ron’s tone of voice conveyed understanding.

“Explains what,” asked Hermione.

“The article in the Prophet. Rita didn’t take a single pot shot at you. Instead she focused on how horrid the law was,” said Ron, and then with a grin. “She’s found herself a really big fish to fry!”

“I don’t know Ron, the marriage law really was horrid.” Harry paused to peer into a shop that used a broom as part of its window display.

Ron paused and came to a full stop. “Dad said the ministry really came under fire after the article in Witch Weekly. People wanted explanations for why dark artifacts like that ring were in circulation. They also wanted to know why you had to go on the run, why the ministry didn’t intervene on your behalf.”

“The reaction to this article is going to be interesting,” said Harry, hoping to put a spotlight on grave mistakes the ministry had made.

“Sirius has been offered the Black family’s hereditary seat on the Wizengamut.” Talk of the ministry reminded her of that recent development. “But he didn’t take it.”

“I can see that,” said Harry, nodding. “Doesn’t trust them.”

“Neither do I but he could do a lot of good.” Her seed of irritation shone through. She didn’t trust the Daughter’s as a whole but she was doing her part for change.

“Don’t push him,” said Harry, warningly.

“Oh, believe me, I know better than to try that.” Hermione let out a sigh of resignation. “He’s going to do exactly what he wants to do.”

“So, who else do you see at the meeting?” Ron brought them back to their original topic.

“Every Slytherin we’ve ever met has a relative there.” Hermione ticked off a list of the names she could remember.

“How did they treat you?” Ron paused to look at sign that read ‘Bowtruckle Pass.’

“We turn right here,” said Hermione, before answering Ron’s question. “They treated me like a necessary evil.”

Harry nodded like it was beginning to make sense. “You’re all about cleaning up their image, aren’t you? Sounds like they might have some embarrassing skeletons in the closet.”

“That’s what Rita said. I’d love to find out what.” She was half afraid to discover what they were capable of.

“So there were no friendly faces?” Ron thought the Daughter’s sounded like an awful group of people.

“Actually, there were some very friendly faces.” Hermione brightened a bit. “Professor McGonagall! Can you believe that?”

“Damn! How has she put up with that lot through the war?” Despite his outburst, Harry breathed a sigh of relief. Hermione wouldn’t be alone.

“Tonks’ mother too, as is Madam Rosmerta and oh, it’s so exciting, Miranda Goshawk!” Hermione nearly squealed but her face fell at their blank expressions.

“Who?” asked Ron, finally after an uncomfortable pause.

“Honestly! She only wrote the Standard Book of Spells, one through seven.” Exasperated, Hermione sighed with mock sadness.

“Is that all? Four and a whole batch of bad?” Ron openly displayed his mistrust of her situation.

“No, there was Madam Marchbanks and Madam Edgecomb, who didn’t seem to like me very much but still, she’s not evil. Then there was Ludo Bagman’s wife, Fudge’s wife, um...” She continued to run through names that were familiar and free of poor associations.

“Well, that’s something I suppose.” It sounded to Harry like the deck was stacked against her.

“Oh,” said Hermione, her expression darkening. “There was one more and you are not going to believe it. I am just sick at having to sit next to her.”

“Who?” Ron wished she would hurry along to the point.

“Delores Umbridge.”

“WHAT?! How did that miserable hag manage that?” Harry stopped dead in his tracks, horrified and angry.

“I know, it’s horrible.” Hermione continued along the cobblestone walk. She turned when Ron broke out into hysterical laughter.

“Do you remember when she was in the infirmary and we made the sound of hoof beats?” He snickered and then snorted, quite tickled with the memory.

Harry was about to ask about how the Daughter’s operated but was interrupted by Hermione. “Well, this is where I get off.” She took note of their confused expressions and so pointed upward.

They boys followed the direction of her finger, their eyes landing on a large sign attached to the building they were in front of. It read ‘Wizarding Wireless Network.’ She had arrived at her destination. She hugged them both before entering the building, glancing back to watch them return to the castle.

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Hermione returned home from her evening as guest host on ‘Witching Hour.’ She had thoroughly enjoyed her time, she found Glenda Chittock to be just as delightful as Sirius had described. He hadn’t returned home yet from Remus’. She half considered sending him a patronus but then decided against it. He was probably having a good time and that thought made her happy. Hermione had made a

decision regarding her education and that was to include Muggle Studies and Care of Magical Creatures for her NEWT level testing. She sat at the dining room table and wrote Dumbledore a note, requesting the change. It would mean more time spent studying but she felt that these two courses would be important in her future. She sent her letter with Mercury and then went into the kitchen to make dinner.

When he got home, she wasn't going to let him weasel out of answering her question about the library. She could not begin to imagine what he could have done down there that he would have to go to such extraordinary lengths to hide it. She entertained herself with possible explanations while she cooked and was so engrossed that she jumped when a pair of soft, warm lips made contact with her neck.

"Sorry, baby. You're jumpy, you all right?" Sirius wore an amused smirk that faded as she narrowed her eyes at him.

"I had my check up today." The look in her eye and the smile on her lips did not match.

"And how are you, how is the baby?" Sirius had forgotten about his little game from a week ago, truly believing himself to smart to be caught.

"The baby is in wonderful health," she paused in her hunt to offer him the good news. Once that was delivered however she was back on the trail. "I too, am in wonderful health."

"Best news ever!" Sirius had just the barest sense of foreboding, there was something off about the way she was addressing him.

"Did you know," she tapped her finger on the kitchen counter. "That sensory loss is never a part of magical pregnancies?"

Sirius paused, stock still, like a rabbit caught unaware by the fox. "Erm...well...did they, uh...tell you how you did lose your sense of

smell.” He was completely off balance, she could practically hear his brain whirring, attempting to find a way out of this mess.

“Did you know,” another heavy pause, “that when I was all of thirteen years old I was told that I was the brightest witch for my age?”

“Of course I know that...” She interrupted.

“Do you imagine that I peaked at thirteen and that it’s been a down hill run ever since?” The slight quirk of her lips gave away that she wasn’t all that mad.

“No! You’re the most intell...” Another interruption from her.

“I quite agree. I am rather intelligent.” He realized with shock that her cocky attitude was borrowed from him.

He straightened himself and stared the storm in the eye. “Alright, what’s this all about?”

“What happened in my library, Sirius?”

He deflated instantly, swearing quietly under his breath.

“I’m waiting...” Her finger was tapping the counter top again.

“It wasn’t just me!” He wasn’t going to go down alone.

“It wasn’t just you, what?” She still didn’t have an answer.

“I smoked a cigar with the guys.” He rushed his words together and spoke rather quickly.

“I’m sorry, once more please, English this time, if you don’t mind.”

“You know I built you that library!”

“Yes and its lovely. Out with it Sirius!” He knew she wasn’t truly angry...yet.

“Cigars, Hermione. Sometimes a man likes to have a cigar with his mates.” He thought he would give the tough, male approach a whirl, see where it got him.

Hermione narrowed her eyes at him, her nose wrinkled in distaste. He thought she was adorable and getting sexier by the minute. He realized in a moment of clarity that he had looked forward to this, to her being angry because she was so god dam gorgeous when she was.

“And why couldn’t I smell said cigars.”

Sirius smiled when he thought about just how angry his next words were going to make her.

“It’s a simple hex, really.”

“What!”

[illegible]

A/N: Thank you for the reviews!

The Bike

Thanks to Tasee1 who co-authored this chapter with me.

Fred and George begged and begged Sirius to let them throw a stag party but in the end he opted to spend the night before his wedding with just himself and the best man. Sirius was worried about the type of mischief the twins had in mind, he knew Remus would only get him miserably drunk but in no real trouble.

“How did we,” Sirius gestured with his empty glass before setting it down, “end up with such young women?”

“I know...look at us, both of us.” Remus shook his head.

“Absolutely no right.”

“None whatsoever.” Remus clucked his tongue. “But isn’t it nice?”

Sirius couldn’t help the lecherous smile. “Great Merlin, yes.”

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Hermione stood in front of the tall footed mirror with her mother standing behind her and looked herself over. She was still awed by the white, satiny dress, beautifully accented with tiny seed pearls. The body of the dress hugged her close down to her thickening waist where it blossomed out into a full, floor length gown. She met her mother’s eyes briefly and smiled serenely as she looked over her shoulder to get a glimpse of the medium length train behind her.

Her mother took a half step up to her daughter, gently turned her and fitted the tiara, fussing with it until it was perfect. Jean took a step back to admire Hermione whose hair and make up were perfected that morning at the spa. Hermione wore her hair down, as requested by Sirius, the large looping curls cascading over her shoulders and down her back.

A knock at the door and Ginny went to answer, brushing off her mother's worrying hands. Herman Granger stood in the door way, smiling at his wife and beautiful daughter.

"It's time, Pumpkin."

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Sirius stood patiently, expectantly and nervously next to his last childhood friend who was his best man. He was quiet in his contemplation of another wedding day, many years ago.

James had been on his mind a lot lately, ever since finding his old quidditch robes. His thoughts were bittersweet of happier days gone by. He half turned to smile at Remus, unable to keep himself from thinking that it should have been James at his side.

"Can you feel them?" Remus whispered quietly in his ear.

"Who?"

"James and Lily. I keep feeling her eyes on me." Remus' voice was sad and wistful.

"I could have sworn I heard James laughing earlier, thought I was going mental." He had to choke back the hitch in his voice.

"I think maybe you have some unexpected wedding guests." The softness in Remus' tone was dry and strained with emotion.

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Clutching her father's arm, Hermione was led down the aisle to her husband. As they passed the back row of pews in the small, intimate church she felt eyes upon her, intently watching. Her step faltered as she turned to look but nothing was there. She recovered and resumed her procession, feeling, oddly, as though she had been approved of. She brushed it off as wedding madness and focused her

eyes on her future who was looking a little nervous. She thought that was adorable considering they were already married six months.

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Symbolically, Hermione belonged to her father as he walked her down the aisle. For the purposes of the ceremony she did not belong to Sirius, she had been taken from him, for however briefly. A small, low growl erupted from him, completely against his will, mentally urging them to move faster along. Even this small ritual separation was unacceptable to him, she was his and his alone. He barely heard the minister ask who was giving the bride away but he was keenly aware of when her father stepped off.

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The minister eyed the assembled guests curiously. On the bride's side were a very nice looking group of people in their Sunday finest. On the groom's side were the biggest bunch of weirdoes in robes and odd hairstyles that he had ever hoped to see. He looked the groom over with his tuxedo like robes and long black hair which hung loose and hoped that Hermione knew what she doing.

“Dearly beloved...”

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After the ceremony there were pictures. After the pictures there was rice. After the rice there was a dance. After the dance there was cake.

Everything moved quickly and in a bit of a blur for Hermione. She was having a wonderful time, everything was just as she wanted it to be. When Sirius removed the garter from her leg and grazed a finger along her knickers, she knew it was time to leave.

She departed with her mother to change out of her dress so that she and Sirius could depart.

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Hermione and her mother walked out of the room together, her mother's arm around her thickening waist. As requested she was dressed in blue jeans, trainers, a long sleeved button down shirt and a light jacket over which she wore her casual robes open. Together they walked towards the entrance where Molly, Arthur and Herman were standing, talking quietly. Bill, Fred, Ron and George were laughing at a joke that Fred had just told, getting drunker by the minute. Ginny was enduring Fleur go on and on about the bridesmaid dress Ginny was wearing and how it just wasn't going to work in her wedding scheme. Tonks, Alicia and Angelina emerged from the loo, their heads bowed, whispering about Fleur. There were some conspicuous absences in addition to her husband, namely Harry and Remus.

"Has anyone seen Sirius or Harry or Remus?" Hermione swiveled slowly around, her eyes sweeping the hall as she cast another hopeful glance. The other assembled guests obscured her view of the whole room but Sirius stood taller than most and would be hard to miss.

"They just stepped away for a minute, they'll be right back." Molly looked at Hermione with a bemused expression when her back was turned. She glanced toward the entrance and then smiled knowingly to Jean.

"Are you all packed up?" Jean looked around for her daughter's luggage, they were leaving for their honeymoon directly after the reception.

Hermione lifted her purse up for her mother to see. "It's all in here, magically sized down to fit."

Harry and Remus returned, breathless, with wide, foolish looking grins on their faces. Hermione caught their attention and waved them over. "Have either of you seen Sirius?"

"Yeah, he's on his way here now." Remus tried to school his expressions into something that looked less like guilt and more like a reassuring friend, but failing miserably.

“Where did he run off to?” Hermione narrowed her eyes at Remus and then at Harry, they glanced guiltily at each other.

“He had to go and get something, he’ll be right back.” Harry smiled a little too widely to be considered innocent.

“Alright you two, what gives?” Hermione heard a faint rumbling in the distance as she conducted her interrogation.

“Wh-what do you mean?” Remus tried to sound blameless of any dark motives. The reverberation in the distance grew louder, whatever was making the noise was closer to the restaurant.

“Your trying a little too hard, Remus. Dead give away. Where is Sirius and what is he up to?” Hermione turned her head toward the entrance, the rumbling was loud and penetrating now as to almost be obnoxious.

“ Wonder what’s making all that racket?” Harry looked from Hermione to Remus and then to the door. The deep piercing roar which was clearly made by an engine of some sort was right outside the restaurant.

Molly, Jean and Herman started toward the door, Molly glanced back over her shoulder to see if Hermione was following them. The Weasley sons stood unsteadily to their feet and lumbered gracelessly toward the sound. Ginny disengaged herself from Fleur and joined Angelina and Alicia in their trek towards the metallic bellow. There was a series of sharp increases in volume from the engine which caused the walls to tremble slightly. The collective scraping of chair legs against the floor signaled the start of an exodus out of doors.

Hermione looked at Remus and Harry who were both trying to hold back laughter, her bewildered look combined with the knowledge of what awaited was too much for them. Her expression turned from one of utter bafflement to that of suspicion which clearly demanded an explanation.

“C’mon Hermione, let’s see what that is. Everybody else has gone for a look, we may as well join them.” Harry reached out for her hand and gently tugged her toward the door.

“What has he done?” Trepidation evident in her tone.

“He has a surprise for you.” Remus took her by the other hand, she finally took a step toward the door.

“It sounds horrendous.” Hermione allowed them to lead her to the door during which she ran through a list of possible magical explanations but nothing was jumping out at her.

When they reached the door Remus politely held it open for her, nervously glancing from her to Sirius whom she couldn’t see yet. He didn’t want to be hexed for his hand in the situation. Hermione stepped out onto the front walk, looked around and caught her breath. Sirius was parked and sitting on the largest motorbike she had ever seen, the sun was setting behind him, a breeze blew through his hair causing it to flutter attractively about. He looked like a renegade prince on his steed. His tight leather pants peaked out from under his long, black, well worn robes which draped casually over the back of the bike. He wore the robes open to reveal a partially unbuttoned white dress shirt, his tattoos clearly visible. He was gazing intently in her direction, eyes roving around, searching for and finally hitting his target.

She was wearing clothes appropriate for a trip above the clouds, just as he had requested, although not in those words. He braced himself for her ire with a cocky grin, confident of his ability to win her over. He was determined to be victorious in the coming battle.

It didn’t hurt that he thought she was sexy as hell when she was angry.

Hermione’s breathing increased as her eyes soaked in this glorious example of masculine beauty. He had gone to some trouble with his appearance, it was part of his plan, victory through seduction, any means necessary. The most impressive piece of clothing gracing his

form were the robes he had found in the closet a couple of weeks ago, his old play clothes, dusted off and donned anew. They were clearly well made, had probably cost quite a few galleons but bore the unmistakable signs of harsh use. Only someone familiar with rough play could pull this coat off. His tight leather pants and open shirt confirmed what the coat suggested. This was a dangerous man, someone to keep your eye on, someone unbelievably sexy. The unbidden warming of her sex forced a blush to rise on her cheeks. She glanced downward in an attempt at getting it under control.

Once the initial rush passed she was able to more closely analyze the scene. The humming monster between his legs was a massive motorbike. Momentary confusion gave way to understanding. He expected her to get on that thing.

Hermione didn't trust motorbikes; an uncle of hers had died horribly in a crash. His mangled body clung to life a few weeks before finally succumbing to his numerous injuries. He was her mother's brother, her favorite uncle. She was only seven at the time. Despite the numerous safe rides her uncle had taken her on, she had had a fear of them ever since.

Hermione shook her head. There was no way she was getting on that bike.

Sirius watched as she shook her head, hands on her hips, eyes imploring. Undeterred and unaware of her emotional state he jumped the curb and rode his blubbering beast over to where she stood, under the awning by the restaurant's front door. He pulled it to a halt in front of her, leaned into the handle bars and playfully raised his eyebrows at her. Hermione took a few steps back.

He quieted the bike, kicked the stand, steadying it into place. He reached his far leg over the bike and leapt off the seat with flair. He gallantly reached his hand out to grasp hers and kissed it softly.

"My lady, your chariot awaits." His playful, coaxing smile put her at ease but it didn't change her mind. Hermione glanced between him and the gleaming blue metal and chrome, cocking her head thoughtfully, deciding that as bikes went, it was rather attractive.

“I’m afraid of bikes, Sirius.” Their eyes met over her words, hers attempting vainly to convey the depth of her fear.

“Have you even ever been on one?” The scoffing tone exposed his doubt.

“Yes.” Simple, honest and small.

“ Oh, really?” His tone playfully disbelieving, convinced if she actually had been on a bike before she would be eager to do so now. “And when was that?”

“When I was a girl. My Uncle Nigel had one.” Sirius caught the look of sadness but couldn’t fathom it. His determination to get her on the bike pushed it aside.

“Well then get on, woman!” He tugged her forward by the hand only to be met with resistance.

“No!” Her face set in determination and steady gaze into his taunting grey eyes finally confirmed for him, her resolve.

He released her hand, still playful and hopped back on his waiting mistress. A flick of his wand and she was purring between his legs once more. “Shall I drop you a post card?” He affected a careless attitude, still trying to tease her out. “Wish you were here.”

Her shock and hurt went unrecognized by him, such was his will to get her on that bike. This was just a game he was playing, throwing out trick after trick to weaken her defenses. She couldn’t believe he would even suggest leaving her behind, in jest or not. “No, Sirius.”

He revved the engine lightly, drowning out her protestation. Hermione jumped back in surprise, wounded by his thoughtless act. Sirius’ awareness was recalled to their audience, his ego bruised over his inability to control the situation, fueled a spark of annoyance. “Get on the bike, Hermione.”

“I will not.” Not liking what he heard he revved the engine again, annoyance creeping into irritation.

Is he not even going to ask me why?

Sirius took a self conscious glance at the gathered family and friends who were watching their display, watching him be rejected over and over by his wife. Irritation mounted into aggravation upon seeing the twins shake hands out of the corner of his eye.

Taking bets are they?

Hermione, too, had seen the twins, the set of her jaw tightened, refusing to be cowed. Her eyes displayed the flash of anger, which she directed at Sirius for putting her in this position. She fumed inwardly and prepared herself to lash out at him.

Sirius read her intent clearly, knowing he had to head this off. He shut the engine off once more, outwardly displaying swallowed pride, inwardly thinking that anything which got her on the bike would be victory. He schooled his features into an apology and reached tenderly for her hand. She willingly took it and allowed herself to be pulled into a hug. He whispered into her ear as he held her. “I love you. I’m so glad I’m married to you and that you are going to be the mother of my child. I know you’re scared but this bike is charmed indestructible.” Her shoulders dropped slightly, relaxation and relief seeping through her.

Almost there, time to sweeten the pot.

“Besides, I think it’s high time I made love to you above the clouds.”

Hermione pulled back from his embrace, puzzled by his words. “Above the clouds?”

“Yeah, baby,” he purred, “you know, on the bike.”

“The bike...flies?”

“Yeah!”

“ IT FLIES!” Hermione jumped back, brushing up against the restaurant’s wall.

Sirius decided to ignore the fact that she was screeching at uncomfortable decibels. “Perfectly safe, baby.”

“Do you know that is illegal? Not to mention...I hate flying!”

“C’mon, baby.” Sirius reached out for her wrist, to pull her into him.

“Absolutely not!” Hermione jerked her wrist up and away, knocking his hand back.

Sirius withdrew from her physically and emotionally, sitting into the bike, taking his comfort in it. She had never rejected his advances before, it felt like he had been slapped. His expression hardened, all softness and tenderness evaporated into the twilight. Rejection was something he had very little experience with; none had ever stung as much as this.

She rejected him and his bike, the bike he had only been able to get for himself because of her. He had never fully expressed what she meant to him, what she did for him, how she had changed him. And now she didn’t want him. He felt his emotions sliding out of control, depression settling into him, he wanted to flee from her so she couldn’t look at him. He felt naked and exposed and unlovable. Something of his old character, his way of coping with disappointments, reached its fingers into his heart, altering his view of reality.

Hermione could sense something was changing, he wasn’t looking at her, he was looking through her.

The bike roared to life with a deafening metallic scream. “If you don’t get on this damn bike, right bloody now, I swear I really will leave you here, wedding day or not.” His voice was cold and emotionless, sounding like someone she had never met.

Hermione had too much self respect to allow this to pass, she shook her head unconsciously. He couldn't say something so disrespectful to her and get away with it. Anger and despair fizzed discontentedly inside her, lips quirked downward in an angry frown. Slowly she removed her wedding band and engagement ring and walked quietly over to him. She took his hand, which he willingly gave, unsure of what she had in mind. She opened his hand and dropped the rings into it.

"You can't talk to me that way and if you do...you don't really love me." She reached up to her neck and took hold of the charm there. One hard, sharp yank and it was broken, leaving an angry red line where the chain had been. He stepped back, refusing to take back the protective charm that only she could have removed. She tossed it at his feet like it were garbage and turned away without looking at him. She walked over toward her mother and father, her happiest day turned into her most miserable.

Sirius bent down to pick up the charm in disbelief. He stared at the rings in his hand, his happiness, his light, his love was walking away from him. He had gone too far in his bid to get her on the bike. He realized the bike meant nothing without her, he meant nothing without her.

"Wait!" He shut the bike off one more time and got off of it.

"Wait, damn it!" He ran over to her and spun her around, he immediately felt the chill, icy, like a wall between them. He couldn't take it, his loving, yielding wife wasn't his now, he could feel the loss of her down to the marrow of his bones. He dropped to his knees before her, utterly defeated, pulling her body flush against his, clutching her tightly as though his life depended on it, resting his head against her belly where their baby grew.

"Do you have any idea what you've done?" Sirius felt himself crack open, the things he was too proud or too cowardly to say pushed their way up through the fissure.

“What I’ve done?” Hermione pulled back angrily, struggling, futile against his strong arms and the fingers that dug into her back.

“I-I’m nothing without you. You remade me, Hermione. You made me something I never was before. A man.” Sirius paused, sobbing, wetting her shirt with his tears. She realized she had misread the situation and placed her hands on his head soothingly, curling her fingers in his dark locks.

“I never thought I’d be happy again, for years I didn’t even know what that meant anymore.” Sirius wiped his nose on his precious robes like a toddler. “You’re so beautiful, so pure...I want to be better...worthy of you...I’d do anything...”

"You did this because of me, didn't you?" Her words were breathless, barely leaving her lips.

Sirius' doleful sob shocked Hermione. She had her answer. Hermione knelt before him and cupped his slick cheeks in her palms.

"You denied yourself this, for all these years?"

He nodded and swallowed a small noise of agreement in his throat.

"I hurt you. I hurt you because of this bloody thing, and I only got the bloody thing because I stopped hurting." His ironic laugh was thick and wet.

Sirius braved her sweet face finding only love in her eyes, her ice melted, washed away in his tears. He leaned his forehead to hers with a relieved sigh, the self inflicted pain in his heart soothed away. He picked her small hand up in his and put the rings back on her finger. “Please...never take these off again.” He tenderly and tentatively cupped her face in his hands and kissed her sweetly, full of his love and devotion.

“I really liked riding on Uncle Nigel’s bike.” Her voice was soft and tentative.

“I’m sure you did. How old were you?” Sirius responded with a tender voice. He wondered if there was still hope for his bike. He had his priorities straight but it never hurt to try.

“Up until I was seven.” He heard the sadness again only now he was paying attention.

“What happened, why stop then?” He felt that he knew the answer before she spoke.

“He died in a crash, a crash on the bike.” It all fell into place.

“I’m sorry, baby. I’ll let Remus take it home. You don’t have to ride.” He resigned himself to a life without a bike.

“Could you take me for a ride, slowly, so I can get used to it again?” She didn’t want to deny him anything and he did say it was indestructible.

“I...you...what? Really?” Sirius stammered, befuddlement and mounting excitement in his tone. Hermione giggled because Sirius Black was rarely so woefully lacking in cool.

“I trust you, you would never do anything to hurt me or our baby. I should’ve known that.” Hermione realized that she too had acted hastily and without thought.

“What about flying?” He braced for a bad reaction.

“I’m not having sex on that thing,” she said, grinning, something like forgiveness in her tone, “at least not while we’re up there.” She flicked her eyes skyward and then back to his face. It took him a minute to realize what she meant.

“Vixen,” he murmured into her ear, placing a soft kiss just below the lobe. She giggled softly and pushed against him playfully. “Are you ready? We’ll go as slow as you like.”

“Lead the way.” She offered her hand, putting her safety into his.

[illegible]

A/N: Thank you for the reviews

PLEASE REVIEW!

Honeymooners

NC17

Sirius waited while Hermione situated herself behind him on the bike. It may have been eleven years or so since she'd last ridden, but not long enough to keep her from getting on with confidence. She wrapped her slim arms over the fabled robes and took hold of him, her body pressed warmly against his back, her head resting on his shoulder.

"All right, there?"

"Perfect." After her uncle passed she missed riding, missed the time they spent together. She remembered laughing gleefully, the wind in her hair, even if it guaranteed a mammoth rat's nest. That memory spurred her thought process. She didn't want to be combing her hair out on her wedding night. "Wait just a second, Sirius." She pulled her wand from her robes and gave it a light flick. A sky blue scarf with delicate flower designs materialized in her hand. She fussed with her hair for a moment, wrangling loose, disobedient strands under the scarf before tying it tightly to the back of her head. For good measure she added a Fastening Charm on the knot to keep it closed and in place. She stowed her wand, leaned forward and placed a light kiss on his neck.

"I'm all ready."

Sirius reached back and patted her leg, believing she might still need some reassurance. "We'll start off slow, you let me know when you're ready for more."

A light flick of his wand and the slumbering blue fiend fired to life. It rumbled sensually between her legs, sensation coursed through her, a feeling which had been absent on her girlhood rides.

"Oh, my..."

Sirius looked over his shoulder at her with a knowing smirk and a bit of a leer. His old bike had never failed to prime a girl for him. He patted her leg again, giving her thigh a light squeeze.

“Where are we going?” She had to speak up to be heard over the bike.

Sirius gave himself a mental kick, he hadn't told her where he was taking her. It was a repeat of his earlier mistake when he hadn't mentioned the bike. Thoughtfully, he turned the bike off and spoke to her over his shoulder as best he could.

“Well, I thought we'd spend tonight at a little bed and breakfast. Why? Do you have someplace in mind?” He noticed the anxious look on Remus' face and shook his head at his friend.

No! I haven't fucked it up again, Remus!

“I...well, no I guess not...” She trailed off, realizing the destination she had in mind put her at odds with her fear of flight.

“Tell me, baby.” His voice was deep and low, filled with reassurance, he would take her to the moon if he could.

“I don't even know if its possible plus I really am nervous about flying.” He could hear the tension in her voice.

“Sweetheart?” Gentle and soft.

“Yes?”

“Are you going to tell me sometime soon where you want to go or should I just get us to the bed and breakfast?” She picked up on his playful amusement.

“Sorry.” Still no answer.

“Where?” He let a small sigh, showing the early signs of frustration.

“Mexico, I mean can the bike even manage a trip that far?” She sped her words together with more still to come.

“Baby...” He tried to interrupt her train of speech but she plowed forward fearlessly.

“And can I manage flying for that long?” She wasn’t through by a long shot.

“Baby...” A little louder this time.

“Won’t our poor bums get tired?” A deep inhale of breath to launch the next question.

“BABY!” He twisted in his seat to look at her better.

“What? Oh, sorry...” She just realized he’d been trying to get her attention.

“My last bike could not have made the trip you just suggested, however, this bike is fitted with a modified Portus Charm. It’s not a true Portkey in the strictest sense so it can’t be picked up by the ministry.” He was rather impressed with himself which added to her annoyance.

“Do you even try to obey the law or is breaking it just a matter of habit by now?” She looked at him with a disapproving frown.

“Ah, but I’m not breaking that law, my sweet. That law is very specific to Portkeys and the Portus charm in general.” Still smug, still very pleased with himself.

“What is the difference, then?” Disapproving and disbelieving.

“We altered the engine with what we’re calling a Portgear. When I push this button here,” he moved aside so she could see, “it activates the Portgear which puts the bike into Portdrive. In Portdrive we move

through space and time exactly like we would with a Portkey but,” he impressively raised a finger to emphasize his point, “instead of being pulled we are being pushed and therefore able to control direction. A Portkey has a specific magical resonance that the Portdrive does not, thereby making it undetectable.”

Hermione had forgotten just how much his intellect turned her on.

“Hadn’t we better get to that bed and breakfast?” Her voice was a little husky, her eyes a little dark and she was a little aroused.

“Sure, baby. You alright?”

“Drive, Sirius.”

“You know, you’re a little bossy sometimes. Anyone ever tell you that?” The laugh in his voice gave him away.

She playfully pinched his side.

“Ow! Alright, we’re on our way.”

He kicked the stand back, slowly moving the bike forward. She bumped up in her seat as they rolled off the curb. Family and friends called out to them, wishing them well as they headed out at a leisurely pace.

Hermione flushed slightly when she saw, out of the corner of her eye, a sour looking George hand over a sack to a smug looking Fred.

Wankers!

0o0o0o0o0o0o0o0o0o0o0o0

Sirius started out their journey with a long drive, over road, through the country. He had reservations at a little bed and breakfast. His plan was to enjoy this first night together without having to worry about travelling. He had figured on picking a destination together

while they were there. He was particularly glad for the drive as it gave her some time to relax a bit and get used to riding on the bike.

When the ride started out she had been a little stiff and clutched to him a little desperately. He had driven at a very leisurely pace on some very lonely roads. It was a beautiful day, the sun was bright but it wasn't too hot. It was, in a word, perfect.

While at a stop, she had asked him why it felt like she was held to the seat magnetically.

"Modified Sticking Charm. It holds us on the bike while the motor is running." It was another magical tweak, he had no desire to risk her safety or that of their baby.

"Oh." She hugged herself to him, very desirous to get him out of his robes.

After that her confidence on the bike rose considerably, it was indestructible, which she assumed to mean it couldn't be wrecked and there was no chance of falling off. No wonder he thought he could make love on the damn thing.

He could feel her looking around, first off one side and then the other. She worked at his distraction, running her hands along his stomach, feeling the muscles there. She talked him, close to his ear, telling him all the things she wanted to do to him once she had him behind closed doors. It was a change for her and was empowering because she knew he was at her mercy. It didn't occur to her that he might pull over somewhere and just have his way with her.

She had no idea how close she came to a little side trip to relieve some frustration.

He let her have her fun, letting her breathy, smitten words excite him. He took satisfaction in the fact that he would have her begging for release soon enough.

They pulled up to the bed and breakfast, Sirius parked the bike and let her get off first. Once he was free of the bike he wheeled around and caught her up roughly against his body, letting her feel his throbbing desire.

He lowered his lips to her ear. "You are going to pay and pay and pay and pay."

She met his threat with a look of challenge. He curled his lip in a smile that was almost sinister, his eyes raked hotly over her body. He reluctantly let her go so he could get their room. She followed behind him, thrilled with her daring, shaking with excitement. While they were standing at the counter, out of the view of the clerk, she snuck a hand under his robes and rubbed his length over his pants. Sirius stumbled across his words and glanced at her, surprise, pleasure and shock written all over his face.

I really need to fight with her more often.

As soon as they left the little office he shoved her against the wall, catching her mouth in an ungentle kiss and rubbing her sex over her pants.

"You are just full of surprises today, baby." He pushed his lips against hers once again, diving his tongue into her mouth and rubbing hard against her pussy. "I am going to have you screaming my name all night long." Hermione squeezed her eyes tight, wondering if she could handle this beast, suddenly quite aware that he had been holding back. She moaned into his mouth, feeling wanton with her open stance where anyone could see.

"Since I don't want anyone seeing what they can't have we better get you inside." He grabbed her by the hand and pulled her along, hurrying to their destination. He needed her inside, disrobed and he needed it now!

He found their room and shakily got the key in the door, pulled her inside and shut it. He took her little handbag off her shoulder and threw it aside. She went at him taking off his robes, pushing them off

his shoulders and to the floor. He pulled her into a kiss with urgency and need, walking her back to the four poster bed while unbuttoning her pants. She broke away from him to push his shirt over his head and letting it drop. He pushed her robes off and lifted her shirt over her head. She unbelted and opened his pants and dropped to her knees.

She pulled his boxers down to his thighs and admired his cock, bobbing gently from its unsheathing. Sirius steadied himself above her, watching his witch rub his length, throwing his head back when her tongue made contact as she licked him from base to tip. Hermione took the head in her mouth, sliding her lips slowly over it, tasting the drop of cum on the tip.

“Fuck! Hermione...”

She slowly swirled her tongue around the tip before taking in as much as she could. Sirius’ tight, panting breaths and occasional curse pleased her and used it as her guide. She wrapped a small hand around the base and pumped in time to her bobbing head while tenderly cupping and massaging his balls. When Sirius began to incoherently beg her not to stop she increased the speed of her tongue around the tip, swirling faster and faster. Her hand gripped him tighter and pumped him faster, her head nodded quickly as if in complete agreement.

“Oh, god...baby...oh, oh...here I...here I come...”

Hermione’s mouth filled with his essence as he grasped a post on the bed to stabilize himself. He looked down at her, blown away that his sweet little witch swallowed. She looked up at him and smiled, suddenly feeling a little shy and not sure what to do next. Sirius gave her a hand up only to pick her up and toss her on the bed with an evil glint in his eye.

“I still have something to make up for.” He flicked his wand at her and then himself, completely divesting them of clothing.

“All’s forgiven, Sirius. I was in the wrong, too.” She tried to sooth him, knowing how bad he must feel over the words he’d said to her.

Sirius shook his head as he advanced on her. “If anyone else had spoken to you the way I did, they’d be a bloody pulp by now.” He crawled to her as she greeted him with her outstretched legs.

Sirius relaxed himself on the bed, languid and gazed at the body of his young wife which was laid out before him. Her smooth creamy legs were spread open before him, one draped over his back the other bent outward at an angle. He could hear breathing increase as she prepared herself for his assault, anxiously and eagerly. He admired how pretty her pussy was, slick and glistening with her own juices. Her smell alone was enough to addle his thinking, he salivated in anticipation. He looked up and their eyes met, all the love and mutual desire reflected back to one another. He returned his gaze to the treat before him, the scant hair that marked her femininity gave way to her pink rosebud. He stroked his fingers on the outside of her sex in a light tease and smiled at her little sigh. He rubbed his finger around the outside of her entrance, tormenting her further and then for added measure he blew lightly over the heated flesh.

“Sirius, please...” Her voice held a waver of frustration, which was pleasing to him.

His hot tongue probed her entrance first, not to penetrate but to further her aggravation. He licked upward, between her soft petals, slowly making his way to his goal. She pressed her body into the bed to control the urge to buck her hips. When he reached his destination, finally, he was rewarded with a sensual moan. He swirled his tongue around her clit, Hermione tried to hold in the groan but couldn’t. He teased her entrance once more, this time penetrating her, feeling her velvety depths under his calloused fingers.

“So good...” Her voice was rough and low as she called out her praise.

Sirius sped up the swirling of his tongue just before he took her nub into his mouth and suckled her. His fingers were massaging her

passage, Hermione lifted her head to look at him only to slam it back down against the pillows. Sirius felt her body shiver, sensing her closeness, he rammed his fingers, now up to three, forcefully in and out. He showed her no mercy, bringing her closer and closer.

“So fucking close, keep going baby, please...”

Sirius brought his other hand down, he grazed a finger along her anus, not wholly sure what her reaction would be. She howled his name as she broke, her sleeve contracting around his finger, her body shuddering and shivering.

Sirius looked up at her enraptured face in complete awe, he loved this moment, when she fell to pieces because of something he did. He kissed her sex, making her jump with oversensitivity and slid up her body, sensually, kissing as he went. He picked up his wand and performed a spell on himself, one she was unfamiliar with. She was surprised when he entered her without all the teasing that so often preceded it. She called to him softly before his lips captured hers in a tender kiss. The kiss was soft and slow, unhurried and sensual. He broke the kiss to whisper in her ear.

“I love you.”

“I love you, too.”

He finally moved within her, much like the kiss, he took his time with his apology. His mouth never left hers as he made love to her, tenderly, slowly.

“I’ll never speak to you that way again.”

Hermione let herself slip away in his tender embrace, in his unhurried love. The coil of tension built up so slowly that she was unaware of just how tight it was wound until it sprang free and moved across her body in deep satisfying waves.

“Now that that’s out of the way.” His eyes held a look of playful malice. She felt a shiver of excitement course through her. “If I

remember correctly I promised to make you pay for that hot little mouth of yours.”

Sirius roughly flipped her over on her stomach, pulled her up by the hips and rammed himself into her.

“How?” Hermione couldn’t imagine how he recovered so quickly, they always came together.

“It’s called a cock ring, sweet.” Sirius pounded himself into her, intoxicated by the rush of the orgasm he couldn’t have. He sought his release fearlessly, knowing it wouldn’t come and trying all the harder just the same. He grinned as he felt her come, helpless to stop it, screaming his name.

He flipped her over and hoisted her legs to his shoulders and buried himself to the hilt. He punished her lovingly for teasing him so mercilessly, for all the sweet promises she made, some already filled by her, others taken by him. He knew he couldn’t take much more, he was dying for his completion. As he felt her come again he released the cock ring and spilled himself into her, collapsing on top of her before politely rolling to the side.

They held each quietly afterwards, softly kissing and touching as they recovered. They made love several more times before exhaustion took them and they fell asleep, wrapped in each other’s arms.

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Sirius begged Hermione to open her eyes, to take in the view before they went into Portdrive.

“C’mom, baby! It’s beautiful up here!”

“I can’t,” she cried, truly afraid that if she looked she would plummet to her death.

“One peek,” he pleaded.

“Fine.” She opened one eye and gasped, both eyes wide open now. “Oh, Sirius. It’s just...it’s so...” She didn’t have words to describe the way the world looked from the other side of the clouds.

The sky was a brilliant blue, the sun bouncing off of every perfect cloud. It gave the illusion that you could just leap from one to the other.

“I told you!” He twisted in his seat to see her grinning face. “All right, let’s see here.” He pulled out his wand and tapped the compass and said, “Mexico.” The arms spun around, resting in a southwesterly direction. He turned the bike in the appropriate direction. “Are you ready?”

“Not really.”

“Excellent! Hold on tight!” He was about to push the Portgear button when Hermione interrupted him.

“I thought we couldn’t fall off!” Her voice was panicked.

“We can’t.”

“Then why say ‘hold on tight’?” Genuine concern and fear laced her words.

“I just like to feel you hold on to me.” Cheeky and smug. “Here we go!” Without waiting for more protestation, he plunged the button in.

Hermione felt she had fused with the bike as it rocketed forward at unnatural speeds. A silent scream, one she was too frightened to give voice to, was frozen on her face. Sirius yipped and whooped like an idiot, thrilled with his toy. They were going too fast to see anything except for the distortion created by the magic. When the compass began blinking he pushed the Portgear button once again and they slowed to normal speeds.

Hermione’s scream finally caught up with her.

Sirius rubbed his ear and laughed, patting her leg in comfort. They dipped below the clouds and continued on to their destination.

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Hermione and Juana chatted happily as they prepared dinner, Sirius and Jorge were outside, smoking cigars and telling lewd jokes. They had arrived that afternoon at the Arroyo's home. Jorge and Juana had rushed out of their house to see what the racket was all about. Hermione and Sirius were pulled warmly into the couple's home, refusing to hear about them staying anywhere but with them.

Juana was in a similar state to Hermione, about a month further along. Jorge strutted about like a rooster, pleased to no end with his 'accomplishment.'

With the fear and uncertain future a distant memory and Sirius' reticence completely forgotten, Hermione was able to appreciate just how romantic their little getaway really was. It was all long walks along the deserted beach, lovemaking just beyond the surf without any worry for prying eyes and sharing one gorgeous sunset after another. The days ran blissfully together, the nights unforgettable.

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A few days later Sirius and Hermione came up for air. Their hosts had been away at work for much of the time which was fortunate as it was doubtful the lovebirds would have noticed them. Sirius and Jorge were grilling on the back patio, sharing a beer and catching up. Hermione and Juana were in the kitchen doing the same.

"So, do you want a boy or a girl, Mimi?" Juana paused by the stove, wiping her hands on a towel.

"I know I'm supposed to say I'll take healthy and that nothing else matters, which is true...but I'd really like a boy."

"Really? You don't want a little girl? I want a girl." Juana added the vegetables she had just cut up into the rice.

“I want a girl, too, but I want a boy first.” Ever since Cliodna had made that crack about her baby, about how she should be embarrassed to give Sirius a son, a half blood Heir, she had fervently hoped for just that.

“Have you talked about names?” Juana took a break and joined Hermione at the kitchen table.

“Actually, no.” Juana took Hermione by surprise. It brought a shy smile, in a whole world of names she would need to pick the perfect one for her baby.

“You better get started! My mother keeps telling me the baby will be here before I know it.” Juana returned to the stove to stir the rice.

Hermione took a little glance at Sirius through the glass patio door, the idea of picking out a name made it seem so much more real, somehow. She wondered what his thoughts were on the matter, had he been thinking about it? He hadn’t said anything to her yet. She decided their nightly walk to view the sunset would be a good opportunity.

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Hermione and Sirius were sitting on the beach, watching the last rays of sunshine disappear into the ocean, saying nothing, just enjoying the quiet and each other’s company. It was their last night in the secluded little getaway, in the morning they would be returning to England. It was hard to believe that they had been away from home for two weeks, it felt more like two minutes, their honeymoon had gone by too fast for her. Hermione was the first to break the silence.

“Have you given any thought to the baby’s name?” She leaned her head against his shoulder.

“Some.” Hermione flicked her eyes up at him, he looked adorable, his expression was soft, filled with wonder and delight mixed in with quiet insecurity.

“Oh, like what?” He surprised her again, looking a little bashful and a little hopeful.

“Well, and I don’t assume that what I want is what I’ll get...” he said, displaying a few of his recent lessons learned. “...but I guess I was hoping that if it was a boy, well, that we could use James in his name, maybe his middle name and if it was a girl we could use Lily.” He glanced at her offering a small smile.

“Why the middle name?” She reached her hand down and placed it into his.

“Oh, I guess I didn’t want to step on Harry’s toes, you know, if he wanted to honor his parents that way.” The twilight slipped further into darkness as he spoke.

“Well, I love that idea.” She gave his hand a squeeze.

His quiet contented sigh filled her heart with warmth.

“What about you?” He nudged against her gently.

“I’m not sure if it’s because I’m muggleborn and so it seems exotic to me but I like wizard names.” She watched his face for a reaction, surprised by his response.

“Exotic, huh? Do you find my name exotic?” He dropped his voice low and brushed his lips against hers. He turned from trepidation to seduction with the blink of an eye, knowing she was blushing even if he couldn’t see it, pleased he still had that affect on her.

“I like your name, if I’m out at night I always try to find you.”

Her sincere confession changed his mood again, standing his ardor down, he lay back with his arms behind his head and searched the night sky. He pointed to something in the heavens. “There I am.”

She tipped her head back, cocked to the side. “My shining star.”

Her neck began to ache and sought relief in changing her position. She stretched her legs out and scooted her bottom over so that she lay parallel to him, arms behind her head.

“So, a constellation or a star, then? What about the name of a muggle god or goddess, still fairly pretentious with homage to your ancestry.” He was sincere but also lightly teasing.

“Well, the baby’s father is named after the heavens, why not the baby?” She smiled at his joke, enjoying their quiet conversation about the future.

“Star or constellation?”

“Either.”

“Do you have a preference, for the sex of the baby I mean?” He let a hand drift over her middle, awed that he was able to have a conversation like this.

“Yes. I want a boy.” Her voice betrayed the emotion she felt on the matter.

“Really? That sure, are you?” He was surprised, he thought all girls wanted girls of their own.

“There’s something I never told you because I knew it would make you really angry.” She glanced at him, weighing whether or not this disclosure was a good idea.

“Oh, what’s that?”

“ Well, Cliodna made an ugly comment about the baby. She suggested that I should be embarrassed to give you a son because it would make the next Heir a half blood.” Her voice was tight and controlled, this made her angry every time she thought about it.

Sirius' features clouded over darkly for a moment. He took a deep breath, letting the anger he felt about 'his kind' wash over him. "That bitch."

"Exactly, so naturally I want a boy now." She put a hand over the hand he had at her middle.

"What if it's a girl?" He turned his head to look at her.

"If I have to be like Mrs. Weasley with six daughters and one son so be it. The Black line will have its half blood Heir." He smiled at the defiance in her voice, it was one of the things he loved about her.

"When can we learn the baby's sex?" He gave her hand a squeeze.

"At my next check up." That thought brightened her up considerably.

"So...boy names, yes?"

"I'd love to start there."

"Hmmm, oh, what about Lupus? You know, the wolf constellation, because then..." Hermione interrupted his train of thought with a pat to his hand.

"Sirius?"

"Yes?"

"Lupus is a muggle disease." There was a little giggle at the end.

"Oh, that won't do, will it? What like a muggle wolf...thingy?" He wondered if there was a muggle version of lycanthropy that made a person look like a wolf.

Hermione laughed. "No, silly. I don't know why they call it Lupus. It's neurological, I think."

“Oh, well, alright then. Let’s see...” Sirius let his eyes drift upward to the sky as he thought of possible names. “How about...well you know we could go with Leo, like the Gryffindor lion. We may want to hedge our bet with my family tree.”

“Leo, Leo, Leo...” Hermione tried the name out slowly, repeating it, like she was tasting it. “Well, it’s a good, strong, male name but, oh, I don’t know. Leo doesn’t seem to feel right to me. Leo James Black. What do you think?”

“No, you’re right. That doesn’t quite fit, does it?” She could almost see his little frown of concentration in the light of the rising moon.

“Let’s avoid the zodiac altogether. There is just something so, so...forced about that. Like we’re trying too hard and looking ridiculous in the process.” She giggled at his sharp look. Leo had been his idea.

“Thanks. Alright, you come up with one.” He turned his attention back to the sky.

“Okay, how about Alshain, the falcon.” It was the first thing she could think of, something she remembered from astronomy.

“Alshain James Black. No, try again.” He summarily dismissed the name, getting even just a bit.

“What? Fine, fine...how about Auriga, the charioteer?” She was still drawing from astronomy.

“I don’t want my son to be a driver,” he said, showing his arrogance.

“I’m just throwing out what I remember from astronomy.” She narrowed her eyes at him and poked him in the side. “Your turn.”

“How about Hercules? Hercules James Black.” He looked at with something like triumph and then annoyance at her giggles.

“ I’m...” She giggled. “I’m never, ever naming a son of mine Hercules.” More giggles. “Ridiculous.”

“Okay, you go then.” Huffy and a bit put out at her laughter.

“What about Perseus?” It was the first one that sounded alright when she said it.

“Perseus James Black.” He didn’t hate it.

“Oh, no,” she said, miserably.

“What?”

“His nickname would be Percy.” She glowered over thinking about the still estranged Weasley son.

“Scratched, too bad to.”

“Well, we have months to figure it out.” Hermione sat up and moved over Sirius to straddle him. “Unless I’ve very much mistaken, we only have one night left on this beach.”

“Oh, yes,” he said, voice husky and eyes clouding over. “I see what you mean.” He pulled her down for a kiss.

They made love on the beach until they were both too exhausted to move. The rays of the sun woke them the following morning. After a little clean up and some good byes to their friends they made the return flight to England.

[illegible]

Power

On the return trip home Hermione and Sirius made a stop to see her mother's aunt in Texas, spending a couple of days with her. Aunt Elizabeth was delighted to see Hermione, whom she hadn't laid eyes on in about five years. The aunt flirted shamelessly with Sirius, going so far as to pat him on the bottom, giving his taut, firm bum a healthy squeeze right in front of Hermione, teasing her about how she'd gotten herself a real stud. She had warned him about the aunt, who was five years younger than Hermione's grandmother, the aunt's sister, but had no idea she would go so far. Sirius just laughed it off and flirted right back with the much older woman. The two got along famously, often teasing Hermione together, who finally realized she just needed to relax. When it came time to return home sincere offers of hospitality were exchanged. Hermione and Sirius hoped she would one day come to visit them.

When the newlyweds came roaring back to England they were refreshed and replenished from their trip but also glad to be home. With the wedding and honeymoon behind them they would need to begin planning the nursery and generally preparing for their bundle of joy.

Sirius landed the bike on a lonely road, close to the coast where no muggles would get the shock of their life. Hermione was completely at ease now, her fear of riding the bike a distant memory. She chatted to him about what she would like to do with the nursery and how she was really quite nervous about her upcoming meeting with the Daughter's. She would only have a day to recoup from their journey and was plagued with serious misgivings about whether she would manage to get the necessary votes. The wedding and honeymoon had pushed these thoughts to the back of her mind but were now stealing their way to the fore with force. Sirius mostly listened to the pleasing sound of her speech, only catching about half of what she was saying as her voice was dwarfed by the rumbling of the engine. He added the necessary 'oh, really' and 'uh, huh' to keep himself engaged in her conversation and to encourage her to continue.

When they turned onto Eternal Springs Drive and eagerly took in the view of their beckoning home they immediately noticed something

rather odd. Their house was covered in owls, what looked to be at least twenty and judging from the droppings they had been there awhile. Sirius parked the bike in the driveway and let Hermione dismount before getting off of it himself and placing the anti theft charm. They exchanged significant looks as they each mentally tried to count the large number of birds.

“Wonder what’s been going on,” said Hermione, worried that this much news couldn’t possibly be good.

Sirius shook his head and shrugged his shoulders in response to her as they took the post from the owls, despite the odd looks from the neighbors.

They entered their home, sitting themselves comfortably in the living room and began opening the mail. Sirius flipped through his stack impatiently, looking for Remus’ neat handwriting, figuring if something was wrong his friend would have left word. He was right about Remus and opened the scroll, his eyes scanning from side to side as he read, his mouth slowly opening wider and wider in complete shock.

“Mum hopes we had a nice honeymoon,” said Hermione absently, without looking up.

“Merlin’s saggy balls, the ministry was nearly overrun while we were gone.” He looked up at her for a reaction.

“What?” Hermione was certain she must have heard him wrong.

“Yeah!” Sirius got up and walked over to the fireplace. He gestured with the letter in hand. “That’s what Mooney says!” Sirius grabbed a handful of floo powder and tossed it into the fireplace. He shouted into the green flames, “Hey Moon!”

Hermione peered curiously over the couch, her eyes darting between the fireplace and Sirius, hoping that this was some sort of a joke. After a minute Remus’ face poked up out of the green embers.

“Thank god you two are home! I’ll just grab Dora and we’ll come over. Oh, and you might want to floo Molly as well.” Without any explanation for what was in the letter or for his tone of urgency he was gone.

Sirius looked back at Hermione in mild alarm and stunned amusement. “What the hell was that all about?” Still in shock he felt the barest tickle of fear crawl along his spine.

Hermione looked even more shocked than he did. “Better floo Molly,” she reminded.

“Oh, right.” He tossed in some more floo powder, this time getting on his knees and bending down into the flames, placing his head in the green fire.

Hermione couldn’t hear what he was saying and was left to wonder. While he was bent over she couldn’t help but admire the way the tight leather pants hugged his firm arse. She decided to forgive Aunt Elizabeth her little transgression, he really was quite irresistible.

Sirius pulled his head out of the fire and got to his feet. “Arthur and Molly are on their way over.” His lips curved down in a puzzled frown, his brow furrowed in concentration. He finally released a defeated sigh and joined his wife on the couch, picking up the stack of letters before he sat.

Hermione laughed softly in mild disbelief. “Do you know a Gertrude Hecklemeyer?”

Sirius looked up from his letter, pausing in momentary thoughtful contemplation before answering. “No, why?”

“Well, she has sent a cursed letter to the Minister of Magic for what he did to us.” Hermione wore a wry grin.

“What did Kingsley do to us?” Sirius asked his question slowly, as though he should have the answer but didn’t.

“Not a clue.” Hermione cocked her head to the side in frank befuddlement.

They were each working on a piece of mail when Remus and Tonks stepped through the fireplace. Tonks rushed into the living room, glaring at each of them but seemed unable to say what was on her mind. She paced in front of Hermione and Sirius, giving little huffs and looking at Remus. Her hair had gone a little spikier than normal and the pink was straying into red. Seeming to come to a decision she cast a defiant look at Remus before stepping up to the bewildered couple on the couch.

“Do you have any idea-” Harshly and then pulled up short.

“What I have been through because of-” Bordering on hysterics and then swallowing her thought.

“Dora, they couldn’t have known.” Calm, placating, trying to reason with her about a topic as yet to be disclosed.

“Nymphadora, will you just spit it out?” Sirius barely held back the laugh over her behavior.

The sound of an activated floo caught their attention, they turned as one to see Arthur and Molly Weasley step into the family room.

“Hello, dears,” said Molly, genuine in her greeting with a sharp look at her husband, who was looking rather grim. “Did you have a nice holiday?”

“Lovely, actually,” replied Hermione with a smile.

“Well, isn’t that bloody fantastic? They had a lovely time!” Tonks nearly spat, her tone derisive.

Sirius stood up. “Enough of this! If I’m going to be attacked in my own home I’d like to know why!”

“Did either of you get a chance to read the article that Rita Skeeter wrote about you, the one on the interview you did with her? It ran the week before your wedding.” Arthur’s tone was tight and controlled.

“Too busy that week,” answered Sirius.

“No, but I heard about it from Ron. He also told me about the reaction at the ministry from the Braithwaite interview. Why? Does whatever this is have something to do with that?” Hermione began to turn the two interviews over in her mind, considering Harry’s words about the possible public reaction.

“It took about a week to really gain momentum, and yes, both articles actually, have everything to do with this.” Ever calm, ever controlled, Remus shed a little light on the situation.

“And what exactly is...this?” Sirius gestured to everyone, indicating that they should sit and politely discuss rather than fight.

“The Society for Distressed Witches got wind of Rita’s article and focused on the fact that a seventeen year old virgin had to have sex with a man twice her age to avoid Azkaban. They centered on the idea that the ministry had contracted for the consensual rape of a girl who was still a student in Hogwarts, gaining quite a large reaction from the public, a huge outcry, really.” Arthur sat heavily into the chair he was closest to.

“That’s a Daughter’s charity,” commented Hermione idly.

“We’ll get to that in a minute,” said Remus.

“Well, I am not opening another letter!” Sirius laid his stack of letters gingerly on the coffee table like he expected them to explode with rough handling.

“Rita’s article made it pretty clear that you were not the villain, Sirius. She rather made you out to be a noble hero of sorts, doing what had

to be done to keep Hermione safe.” Remus had to chuckle at the look of fear on Sirius’ face.

“That’s actually the truth and was something I made pretty clear in the interview. We did want light shed on what we went through.” Hermione leaned into Sirius in a quiet demonstration of their solidarity.

“Of course you did,” said Molly sympathetically. “You couldn’t have known what would happen.”

“We barely kept the ministry safe from attack. When we were unable to produce the two of you for questions, to help calm the public down, a rumor got started that you were forced on the run again. Witches and wizards from all over Britain flooded the ministry and started hexing everything in sight, it was a mob.” Arthur rubbed a weary hand on the back of his neck.

Hermione and Sirius shared a look of shock. “Why would we have been forced on the run again?” Hermione didn’t follow that track.

“To hush you up, get rid of you quietly. As if the Aurors would be involved in something like that.” Tonks was on her feet again. “I have had more hexes thrown at me by matronly old witches in the last week than by every death eater I’ve ever run across. Combined!”

“Any get through?” Sirius tried but failed to keep from laughing.

“It isn’t bloody funny, Sirius! You could have told someone where you were going, you know!” Tonks glared at him balefully.

Sirius put his hands up in mock defeat. “Alright, alright, calm down.”

Hermione was quite irritated by Tonks. She could certainly sympathize with what her fortnight must have been like but there was absolutely no reason why they should have given up their privacy. “Actually, Tonks, I quite disagree. We were on our honeymoon! What would you have done? Drug us away from our holiday? Send dozens of reporters to take snapshots of us from every angle? No, thank you! There were dozens of witches and wizards at our wedding, they saw

us leave together. Surely that could have been used as proof!" Hermione had started off irritated and ended up angry. She met Tonks' glare evenly until the other witch looked away.

"We did get our hands on a candid photo or two but it was hard to tell if it was actually the two of you. Your photographer refused to release your photos without consent and the ministry had no grounds to seize them." Arthur looked wearily at Hermione and Sirius, the difficulty of his week evident in the exhaustion on his face.

"The ministry is not the only one in hot water over this," began Remus. "Rita did a follow up article the next week. She dug up hard proof that Narcissa Malfoy, in her capacity as Chairwitch of the Liaison to the Ministry of Magic for the Daughter's, introduced a draft of a writ that outlined the creation of the Office for the Control of Unmarried Muggleborns and the specific details of the marriage law."

"I wonder just how close Rita was to finding that proof when she did her interview with us." Hermione turned to Sirius thoughtfully.

"You think maybe she already had it in hand?" Sirius' tone was grim; he understood Rita but still didn't like to think of her orchestrating the events of the last two weeks.

"She did know when the ceremony was going to be held and could have assumed we'd go on a honeymoon," added Hermione, continuing her train of thought.

"You don't seriously think-" Molly started to say and then changed her mind. "You're right, it probably was calculated, that woman loves to stir up trouble."

"So now the Daughter's and the ministry have a lot of difficult questions to answer and all of it centers around us." Hermione sighed heavily and rested her head on Sirius' shoulder.

"I'll bet at least some of that mail is from the Daughter's," said Sirius with a grin, she would be quite a commodity to the Daughter's.

“Rita said there was more; ‘nastier’ is the word she used to describe it.” Hermione’s clever mind was piecing out how this could work to her advantage. “Did you say that Narcissa was acting in her official capacity as Chairwitch of the Liaison to the Ministry of Magic?”

“Yes, I did,” replied Remus.

“Well, she’s no longer in that position, Umbridge is,” said Hermione. “I wonder when that change took place and why?”

“So are things under control now?” Sirius directed his question to Tonks.

“Not really, I mean we have the violence under control but only by closing the ministry down. That’s been going on for four days now,” she replied.

“You must be joking!” It was almost too much for Hermione to get her brain around, the sheer enormity of hearing that the government had come to a standstill was staggering.

“Serves them right,” said Sirius defiantly, daring either Arthur or Tonks to contradict him.

Remus wrapped his arm around Tonks’ waist, encouraging her to hold her tongue. The bottled response to Sirius’ statement broiled just beneath the surface. Her last two weeks had been sheer hell, as a ministry employee she was one of those people who had been rightfully served, according to Sirius.

“We’d like for the two of you to come forward and make a statement, show the public that you’re both alright. It isn’t Kingsley’s ministry that is responsible for this, after all.” There was a pleading note in Arthur’s voice.

Sirius looked at Hermione with a raised eyebrow, he knew as well as she that simply coming forward with a statement of support would diminish some of the power she could potentially wield. It was, in his opinion, her move and he would back up whatever decision she

made. Hermione read his expression perfectly, she paused, taking a moment to consider Arthur's request and the impact such a willing exoneration could have.

"No. I'll contact Braithwaite and do a quick interview about how we have returned from our honeymoon but I will not make any statement about current or past regimes until I've been to the next Daughter's meeting." Hermione sounded firm but she was a little nervous making such a strong statement of refusal to Arthur Weasley. Sirius picked up her hand in his and gave it a little squeeze.

"Now wait just a minute," Tonks wrenched herself free from Remus.

"You heard her," growled Sirius, taking on a frightening look in defense of his wife.

"Hear me out, Dora," said Hermione evenly. "Before I make any such statement I would like to speak to the current Chairwitch of the Liaison to the Ministry of Magic. The next meeting is tomorrow, it will keep until then."

Tonks shook her head but could see that their resolve was firm.

Sirius squeezed her hand and stood up. "We've just returned from our honeymoon. We haven't had a chance to unpack, read our mail or rest from the return trip home. My wife is pregnant and doesn't need all this stress." The conversation was over and he was asking everyone to leave.

Molly wasted no time, patting Sirius on the arm and hugging Hermione warmly. "Good to have you two home." She gave Arthur a look that meant business. He stood up and shook Sirius' hand, saying nothing, clearly unsatisfied. They left by floo leaving Sirius and Hermione alone with Remus and Tonks.

Tonks took a step toward Hermione, intent on making one last bid. Sirius stepped in front of Hermione who was still sat upon the couch. Tonks met her cousins determined gaze with one of her own. She relented first with an irritated, "Fine!" She left without another word to

anyone but giving Remus a withering look that spoke of her dissatisfaction with his lack of support. Remus watched her leave, plainly dreading having to face her ire when he returned home.

“Sorry, mate,” said Sirius sincerely.

Remus shook his head. “This unfortunate situation is not of your making. I really do sympathize with her position, the last two weeks have been miserable for her but you didn’t know what was happening and you have every right to play this how you see fit. I’ll just have to try and help her understand that.” He let out a long, weary sigh.

“I’ll contact Braithwaite immediately, that should alleviate some of the tension,” said Hermione, trying to be helpful, at least in part.

“Thank you, and now I bid you a good afternoon.” He smiled a little grimly and left by floo.

“Wow.” Hermione looked at Sirius in disbelief.

“ Yeah.” He raised his eyebrows in a look of reluctant comprehension and shook his head.

Hermione conjured a quill, a pot of ink and some parchment. She penned a note to Braithwaite, letting her know that an interview as soon as that day would be fine. She sent the letter off with Mercury, urging him not to dally.

She returned to her stack of mail, still not able to completely digest all that had happened in her home in the space of an hour and a half.

“You alright, there?” Gently and with a smile for her.

“Yeah, just a lot to take in.” Still disbelieving. “I think I’ll just finish up the mail here.”

“Good.” Sirius nodded. “I’m going to vanish the owl shit.”

Hermione shook her head and giggled as he walked out the front door to his self appointed task.

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Hermione purposefully arrived a little late to the Daughter's meeting, entering nonchalantly, greeting McGonagall and Andromeda warmly. Both women seemed quite unperturbed which was in stark contrast to that of many of the other members. Umbridge tried to pull Hermione to the side for a word but she seemed to not hear the simpering, "hem, hem," that the insipid woman always used to gain attention.

Hermione made her way over to Miranda Goshawk, a woman she was determined to get to know better. She was aware that she was being pursued by Umbridge but her position as Chairwitch of the Liaison to the Ministry of Magic kept her inundated with questions about the current state of affairs. On her way over to Miranda she took note of the tightly knit group of women surrounding Narcissa Malfoy. They were standing in a far corner of the large room, well away from anyone else, talking quietly and looking about furtively. The thing that stood out the most to Hermione was that their number was greatly reduced. There had been well over a dozen at her first meeting but now there was less than ten. Hermione remembered several of their names from her introduction. She burned into her mind the name of each and every witch currently surrounding Narcissa Malfoy.

Before Umbridge was able to press Hermione for an audience the house elves had begun to serve dinner. Hermione blatantly and rather rudely ignored every attempt her neighbor made at communication. Instead she engaged Ursula Ollivander, her neighbor to the right, in light conversation, never once mentioning the circumstance Narcissa Malfoy had forced upon the Daughter's.

Hermione did learn quite a bit about how the Daughter's were organized from Ursula. Each member was required to serve on a committee which was a detail that had not been imparted to her at her first meeting. She knew that each committee had a Chairwitch but what she didn't know was that this was an elected position. The Madam President was elected from among these five Chairwitches.

She also learned that within the last six months there had been some significant changes.

“Of course a witch can be removed from her position as Chairwitch over a committee however I’ve only seen it happen once in the last thirty five years of membership,” said Ursula, wife of the wand maker.

Hermione realized she must be referring to Narcissa Malfoy’s loss of her position on the Liaison to the Ministry of Magic. “Really?”

“Oh, yes. Just recently as a matter of fact. The Chair on the Liaison to the Ministry of Magic changed hands as a result of a vote, a rather rare and unique event. Of course then there had to be a vote for a new Madam President.” Ursula gave Hermione a significant look and then flicked her eyes at Narcissa Malfoy.

“She was Madam President as well?” Hermione realized that for an organization that was slow to change recent events must have been a real shake up.

“So how did she get to be Chairwitch of the St. Mungo’s Helping Hand Fund?” Hermione heard a plaintive “hem, hem” from her left side and pointedly ignored it.

“The usual way, the prior Chairwitch retired the position. Columba Rosier, the previous Chairwitch, is getting up in age and decided it was time.” Ursula heard Umbridge make another attempt, this time rather loud and insistent. She paused to give Hermione an opportunity to respond however it didn’t take long for her to realize that wasn’t going to happen so she continued on. “Probably for the best, Narcissa was getting restless without anything to do.”

Hermione raised her eyes at this but Ursula wasn’t able to expound on that thought. Dinner had concluded and Madam President Minerva McGonagall was calling the meeting into order. As Madam President it was her privilege to give the report for her committee, the Hogwarts Scholarship Fund, first. Her report was short, noting a few significant contributions and reporting on how the gold was being managed.

Once that was concluded she addressed the assembly regarding the upcoming vote.

“We have a unique opportunity tonight, in over seven centuries our organization has kept its ranks closed to a significant portion of our community. Tonight we can make an historic change, I encourage each and every member to open their hearts and minds and make the choice to include Hermione Granger Black among our number.” She smiled at Hermione before calling on the next Chairwitch to give her report.

Narcissa Malfoy’s report was quiet and brief and there was no mention of Hermione whatsoever. None of the fire she had so openly displayed at the last meeting surfaced. She barely raised her eyes to the assembled witches, her report over almost as soon as it had begun. She gave no acknowledgment that she was finished, she just returned to her seat and went silent. After an awkward pause McGonagall called for the report on the Queen Maeve Benefit Fund.

Cliona Lestrangle reported that the last Queen Maeve gala had to be cancelled and that refunds were being distributed. “I don’t need to remind any of you that Queen Maeve is our largest source for donations, all of our charities depend on it. Recent events,” she flicked her eyes hatefully at Narcissa, “threaten serious consequences for our centuries old organization. I feel that I have gotten to know Hermione Black well enough to say that she would be a great asset to us. I would like to join with the Madam President in encouraging each of you to vote in favor of her.” She nodded to McGonagall, returning the floor to her. McGonagall called for the report from the Society for Distressed Witches.

When Syrma Flint stood to make her presentation she first addressed Hermione directly. “I want to offer my sincerest apologies for the wrongs done to you by one of our own committees.” She paused and cast a disparaging look at Narcissa Malfoy. “I am ashamed to be associated with such an atrocity. The Daughters of the International Warlock Convention of 1289 has held its head high for the better part of seven centuries with a firm commitment to help those who are less fortunate in our community. I was so pleased to see you in attendance tonight and urge each and every member,” she paused to

look around at the entire table, “to cast their vote in favor of having this courageous young woman join our number.” She continued with her report stating that her committee had far surpassed any previous month’s donations since the foundation of the charity. She returned the floor to McGonagall who called for the report from the Liaison to the Ministry of Magic.

Delores Umbridge stood and took a half step toward Hermione, clearing her throat before she spoke, not quite meeting Hermione’s eyes but always slightly to the left or the right. “The words I would say in apology would hardly compare to the suffering which you have bravely endured as a result of the actions of my predecessor. It is a poor representation of the purpose of the Liaison to the Ministry of Magic. This is an injury that once done, cannot be undone. We are facing our darkest hour as a result of her action and find ourselves at your mercy. I sincerely fear that without your gesture, that of joining our number, our once illustrious organization may be cast into the twilight of its existence. I too am heartened by your presence here tonight.” She turned her attention to the entire body of witches. “I would like to take this opportunity to go a step further and demand that each member cast their vote for this young woman at whose feet we currently find ourselves. I have nothing further.” She resumed her seat with a nod to McGonagall and focused on the parchment she had in front of her. Hermione thought the speech sounded rehearsed and wondered just how many hours Umbridge had spent in front of a mirror, practicing to get it perfect.

McGonagall stood once more and addressed the assembly. Instead of making a prolonged apology she professed her belief that the membership would do the right and necessary thing and vote for Hermione’s inclusion. The words she did finally speak to Hermione resounded strongly in the younger witch.

“Tonight you will be given a rare opportunity. Use it!”

McGonagall flicked her wand and produced two pieces of parchment. On one the word ‘Aye’ was written on the other ‘Nay.’ McGonagall reminded them that the parchments would only take one vote from each witch. Hermione was asked to retire to one of the antechambers while the vote was conducted. Upon closing the doors behind her she

heard the lock click. She sat in the oppressively green room, trying to ignore the portraits whispering to her about how she was unworthy to be counted among them.

Hermione got up and pressed her ear to the door but she couldn't hear anything from within the main chamber. She didn't sit back down, opting to instead pace nervously back and forth. She was optimistic about inclusion after hearing speech after speech filled with apologies for the marriage law. Each chairwitch had made a case for adding her to the Daughter's, each had held a note of desperation. There was of course one glaring exception. Hermione wondered if Narcissa would once again be removed from a position of power, whatever influence she may have once wielded here, it was clearly shattered.

She turned her thoughts to which committee she would petition to serve on. She wanted to do something to help muggleborns like herself but there really wasn't a committee geared toward that. She supposed that the Liaison to the Ministry of Magic would be her best option there but of course that would mean working closely with Umbridge.

The lock on the door clicked again and the doors swung slowly open. McGonagall called for Hermione to return to the gathering. Hermione returned to the large chair bearing the Black family crest and waited. McGonagall was staring at the two pieces of parchment, still waiting for the result although the vote itself was clearly over. Hermione knew the second the results were in by the look of satisfaction and relief on the face of McGonagall.

"Congratulations, Hermione Black! You are officially a Daughter!" McGonagall looked well pleased by the result. A round of polite applause went up in her honor.

McGonagall flicked her wand and a very large, clearly ancient, tightly rolled scroll appeared on the table in front of her. McGonagall asked Hermione to come to her. The room was silent, only the clicking of her heels could be heard as she made the long walk to the other side of the very large table. McGonagall indicated that she should stand beside her chair and once there requested her hand. McGonagall

conjured another ancient artifact, a very old quill. "We've checked it for curses."

Hermione looked at her puzzled, not understanding what she meant by that. It all became quite clear when McGonagall picked up the quill and in a sudden and sharp move she pricked Hermione's finger and then handed the quill to her.

"In blood?" Incredulous.

"Purebloods," returned McGonagall wearily.

Hermione added her name to the official roster after which McGonagall advised her to be thinking of which committee she would like to serve on and to have her answer by the next meeting. McGonagall then adjourned the meeting, encouraging each member to greet Hermione personally and congratulate her.

A few witches, about nine in total, Narcissa among them, left without a backward glance.

Hermione was approached by witch after witch, most whom only offered a few perfunctory words of welcome. Hermione was reminded once again of feeling like a necessary evil. Andromeda gave her a huge hug and invited her for a visit so she could talk to her about the committee she served on, the Society for Distressed Witches. McGonagall reminded Hermione about her invitation to tea which would be in her private quarters at Hogwarts in two weeks time.

Hermione dallied on purpose, knowing that there was one witch who was rather desperate to speak with her. Hermione detested Umbridge and wanted this conversation over with quickly. Umbridge attempted at pleasantries but Hermione cut across her rudely. She did not mince her words, coming straight to the point.

"The only way I'm making a statement in favor of the ministry is if you grant me access to every document the Liaison to the Ministry of Magic has forwarded to the ministry for the last several years. I know there are some dark secrets involving muggleborns and I want to

know what they are. I want to see them, touch them and copy them. Otherwise I will openly denounce the ministry.” Hermione looked Umbridge straight in the eye, brooking no disagreement.

Umbridge smiled a wide, false smile and in her high girlish voice said, "Of, course."

“Good,” said Hermione, flicking her wand, producing a parchment with several runic symbols written across the top. “There will of course be this magically binding document created to hold you to your word and prevent you from destroying any and all documents.” Hermione let Umbridge know she was no fool. She produced a quill and a pot of ink.

The other witches character changed immediately. She regarded Hermione coldly, harshly picking up the quill, signing her name with an ugly look at Hermione and then issuing a short, sharp, “Fine!” Umbridge pushed roughly past Hermione and left.

Hermione grinned from ear to ear and couldn't wait to get home and tell Sirius all about her evening.

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0o0o0o0o0o0o0o0o0o0o0o0o0o0A/N: 1000+ REVIEWS!! squeals
Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!

I miscalculated the birth month, Hermione will be delivering in early November, not late September. Oops! I will fix it in the story sometime when I'm not busy working on the next chapter.

F.L.E.M.

Sirius found Hermione in the basement reading the books on the Daughter's that she had purchased that morning. She had shut herself away in the basement for the entire day, studying and reading up on her newest endeavor. He had two letters which he handed to her, before selecting a favorite from off the shelf so he could spend some time in her company. The first letter she opened was a reply from Braithwaite, apologizing for not getting back to her right away and letting her know she would be popping by within the hour. The second letter had her absolutely incensed.

"That's robbery!" she shrieked, holding the letter up and shaking it.

Sirius took the letter from her and read it. "So?" He handed it back to her nonchalantly. "Just have them take it out of Gringotts."

"Two thousand galleons a year!" Hermione glared at the letter in her hand.

"Surely you knew there would be dues," he said calmly, like it was perfectly obvious and nothing to be alarmed about.

"How does someone like McGonagall pay that?" She looked at it again in utter disbelief.

"Well, it said something about monthly installments," he commented, with an aloofness she found grating.

She stomped out of the library, mumbling darkly to herself. He was certain she muttered something disparaging about over privileged purebloods as she went. She stopped at the top of the stairs, like she had thought of something else to say when the doorbell rang. He watched with no small amount of amusement as she pulled herself together and went to answer the door.

She welcomed Braithwaite into the house and led her into the family room where they settled themselves. Sirius made a short appearance to say hello and then made himself scarce.

“Thank you for asking me to do the interview, Hermione. You’re pretty big news right now, you know.” Braithwaite smirked at the young woman who was commanding so much attention.

Hermione closed her eyes and sighed. “Oh, I know, I’m sure you’ve heard about the big news conference at the ministry?”

“Are you kidding? There hasn’t been an uproar like this since Sirius received his pardon,” said Braithwaite.

“I remember that,” said Hermione, shifting a little to stretch.

“I know you’re busy this afternoon so I’ll make this quick.” Braithwaite conjured a small parchment pad, a pot of ink and a quill. “So, where’d you go?”

“Well, we started out at a little bed and breakfast,” said Hermione.

“Very nice, which one?” Braithwaite looked up and smiled as she took notes.

“I think Sirius said it was one of those owned by the Bletchleys.” Hermione tried to remember the name.

“Amortencia in the Air Cottages?” Braithwaite looked up for confirmation.

“Yes!” Surprised recognition. “I can’t believe I recognized the name,” said Hermione absently. “He had me in the cottage so fa-” Hermione remembered her audience who was now wearing a little smirk as she took notes furiously.

“And then where did you go from there?” Braithwaite started a new piece of parchment in her small, conveniently sized pad.

“Well, we don’t like to say, we keep it private and to ourselves but I will tell you the weather was wonderful and the water was grand.” Hermione wore a soft, secret little smile.

“Sounds lovely, were you seaside?” Braithwaite didn’t look up from her note taking.

“ Yes, actually, long lovely beaches and absolutely gorgeous sunsets.” Her eyes softened, for just a fleeting moment she saw herself back on the sand walking hand in hand with Sirius.

“Alright, Hermione, I think I get the gist of it,” said Braithwaite. “It sounds like the two of you had quite the romantic honeymoon holiday.”

“ It will definitely run in the evening Prophet?” Hermione and Braithwaite stood up together.

“Oh most definitely, this is big, big news. I was in the newsroom when I got your owl. Skeeter spilled coffee all over her dress when she heard you had asked for me.” Braithwaite gave Hermione a conspiratorial smile, apparently news of their animosity had made it into Rita’s professional life.

Hermione walked her guest to the door, bade Braithwaite a good afternoon and shut the door. Hermione suddenly realized she was hungry. She went into the kitchen and made sandwiches for herself and Sirius. She called for him to come and join her in a light lunch. She had already forgotten about her earlier gripe concerning the dues for the Daughter’s. They had to be at a news conference at the ministry in an hour which made her jittery and nervous.

“It’s going to be fine, baby,” said Sirius, his voice soothing.

“ Oh, I know, still, reporters, cameras, the Minister of Magic...” Hermione trailed off.

“Oh, come on, you know Kingsley,” he reassured.

“You’re right, I know.” She nodded, her anxiety somewhat abated. She got up from the table and took her plate into the kitchen. “I’ll just change and then we can go.” She left the kitchen for the bedroom, her anxiety stealing quietly back with every step she took from his encouraging presence.

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Rita Skeeter was among the reporters in attendance for the news conference, looking rather smug and self satisfied. The plan was for Hermione and Sirius to each make a statement which would then be followed by Kingsley with a statement of his own.

“The ministry has not been tracking us down, we were out of contact because we were on our honeymoon. We do not hold the current administration accountable for the bad actions of the one preceding it. We offer our full support to the current Minister of Magic, Kingsley Shacklebolt.” Hermione held tightly to Sirius’ hand as she faced the room full of reporters.

“We’re fine,” said Sirius, much more relaxed than she. “We just required a bit of privacy, you understand, newlyweds.” Huge, cheeky grin and then a nuzzle at Hermione’s neck.

As they stepped to the side to make room for Shacklebolt she gave him a look, attempting to remind him where they were and to ask for a little decorum. He just returned a smug grin, completely unapologetic.

Kingsley took the podium. “My administration denounces the so called ‘marriage law,’ a thinly veiled attempt at the incarceration of muggleborn witches. It is most unfortunate that these two fine individuals have both been horribly wronged by past administrations. I am extremely grateful for their endorsement of my ministry.” He turned to Sirius. “Additionally, it is my very great pleasure to announce that the Black hereditary seat on the Wizengamut has been restored to you Sirius and I hope to see you in our chambers.” Kingsley knew better than to push Sirius on reparations but he would get him on the Wizengamut if he could.

Sirius eyed Kingsley reproachfully, feeling it was a dirty move given the circumstances. His lips disappeared into a thin line, he didn't care how hard Kingsley and Arthur pushed, there was absolutely no way that he was going to change his mind.

The floor was opened to the reporters, the first selected was Rita Skeeter. "Where did you two lovebirds run off to on your honeymoon hideaway?"

Sirius fielded the question for them. "Top secret, Rita. We like having a place to run to where no one can find us."

Braithwaite got the next question. "Hermione, there is a rumor that you were inducted into the Daughters of the International Warlock Convention of 1289, is that true?"

Hermione smiled broadly, knowing that Braithwaite was probably kicking herself for not asking that question earlier in the day. "Yes, Betty. That's true."

Winkus Oddpink was the next reporter chosen. "Sirius, you are going to take your seat on the Wizengamut, aren't you? I heard an odd rumor from some ministry officials that it had already been offered to you and you turned it down."

Sirius nodded, giving a superior, triumphant glance in Kingsley's direction. "You heard right. I'm not interested."

There was a quiet, rumbling sound of collective shock from the gathered reporters. Kingsley took the opportunity to bring the news conference to a close. He led Sirius and Hermione through a back door so they could avoid the mob of reporters. Kingsley gave Sirius a sly smile. "I had to try, you know that, Sirius."

Sirius returned a smile, grudgingly and nodded but didn't say anything. There was an awkward pause during which Hermione tried to think of something to say but found nothing suitable. She finally offered Kingsley a tight smile and asked Sirius to take her home, claiming she didn't feel well.

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The following day Hermione checked the Daily Prophet over carefully, finding two articles about her. The front page was all about the news conference at the ministry with a large picture of herself and Sirius in front of the podium. She was trying to sneak slowly out of the frame while Sirius kept pulling her back with a cheeky grin. In the society pages was an article of real interest to her. It was an announcement put out by the Daughter's regarding their newest member. They were eager to prove that they were willing to learn from their mistakes. In the announcement, Hermione noted with interest, was the final tally of forty to nine. She remembered quite clearly that Narcissa Malfoy and her friends totaled nine and that they had left directly after the meeting.

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The rest of the week went by uneventfully, there were several articles in the Prophet about the ministry and its recovery. There were also several ministry sponsored public service messages about muggleborns in the wizarding world. Sirius made the comment that she was already having an impact which pleased her to no end. By the time the weekend rolled around she looked back on her week with satisfaction, having gotten a lot of studying done.

Her efforts had taken time away from Sirius who was craving her company. He joined her in the library, reading a book which had been a birthday gift from Lily. He'd found it when they first opened the house to clean it. Part of him thought he should give it to Harry but just like the robes upstairs, he wasn't quite ready to let go. He hadn't touched the book since he found it and had quietly added it to the library, saving it for a day when he could.

"What are you reading?" She was finally able to focus on something other than her studies.

“Shakespeare.” No mention of Lily. Noticing the long pause he looked up to see her shocked face. “Don’t be so surprised, Hermione.”

“Sorry, its just he was a muggle. When did you first read his works?” She unknowingly pulled at his heart’s strings.

“Lily,” he said quietly. “This book was a gift from her.” The sadness in his face, that brought out lines not normally seen gave her an appreciation for all the hurts he bore that she knew of on the surface but had never delved into with him. She stood up and padded over to him and joined him, settling her warm body close to his, offering solace with her presence.

“Read something to me.” She sat flush against him, a leg over his, her head on his shoulder.

Her request halted his melancholy, pulling him out of his lament of the past, bringing him back to the present. He recognized an opportunity for romance when he saw one and decided to make the most of it. He was pleased by her surprise, that he could keep her guessing. He flipped a few pages, glancing slyly over at her, sending a little thank you to Lily.

“What is love? ‘tis not hereafter

Present mirth hath present laughter;

What’s to come is still unsure;

In delay there lies no plenty;

Then come kiss me, sweet and twenty,

Youth’s a stuff will not endure”

“Live in the now? Like, right now?” She crawled over him, to straddle him.

“Exactly,” he purred, his eyes darkening with lust as he tossed the book aside.

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Harry and Ron would be arriving to spend the weekend after their quidditch match against Slytherin. Hermione and Sirius decided to attend the match as a surprise for the boys. Dressed in jeans and trainers, Hermione pulled on a sweatshirt to guard against the chill of a March morning in Scotland. Over this she wore simple black robes and of course a scarf in Gryffindor colors. Sirius strode into the bedroom to see if she was ready, pleased at how excited she was about their day out together. From behind her he placed a kiss on her neck, smiling as she reached a hand up to touch his face.

“You ready to go?” Sirius turned her around to look into her pretty brown eyes.

“Oh, yes,” she said excitedly. “It’s been so long since I’ve seen Harry play.”

Sirius guided her out to the backyard, hand at her back and pulled her close. They Apparated into Hogsmeade and were met at the school gate by Professor Flitwick who greeted them warmly. The tiny man’s face was suffused with joy over seeing his star pupil once again.

“I trust you are studying for your NEWTs?” He had to lean his head back to make eye contact.

“Oh, yes Professor, quite a lot actually since I hope to add Muggle Studies and Care of Magical Creatures.” Hermione enjoyed the attention from her professor, it felt warm and familiar to her and was something she missed. She fully expected Sirius to make a clever comment about her overzealous study habits and how she did little else but he didn’t. She glanced up at him to find a look of near desolate longing on his face. She felt a pang in her heart for what he must be feeling. Some of his happiest days had been spent here at a time when his best friend was still alive and his whole life was in front

of him. She looked away, knowing he would not want to confront those feelings in this setting. Her hand slipped into his, just like it might at any other time, hoping he could draw some comfort from her. She engaged her former professor in further conversation as they walked along the path that would lead to the pitch.

Sirius took in the sight of the castle and grounds and was reminded forcibly of James. The night of the final battle was the last time he had been here, having spent several days prior preparing for the coming war, relieving him of the need to process any feelings. Now that he was here once again, without the blessed impending doom to distract him, his loss pressed upon him wearily. The friendly chatter of his wife and her professor seemed to come from far away as passing landmarks triggered memories of pranks, friendship and youthful abandon. Overwhelmed, he heard a light buzzing in his ears, the constriction in his throat feeling tighter and tighter and then like an angel of mercy she slipped her small hand into his. He wondered if she knew as he drew needed serenity from her quiet strength, loving her for the comfort she provided whether she knew it or not. His mind clear, he focused on the fun that today was supposed to be about.

Flitwick deposited them at the pitch and excused himself to go herd students and generally keep order. This was a Gryffindor versus Slytherin match, there was always some rule breaking happening somewhere. They found their seats, settled comfortably and waited for the match to begin.

“Are you alright, sweetheart?” Gentle, tender voice from the angel next to him who was leaning in, borrowing warmth to ward against the March morning’s chill.

“Yes and thank you,” he said quietly.

Suddenly seven flashes of crimson and gold whizzed by and they were on their feet cheering. Harry’s team took another pass around their supporters, as they flew by Ginny noticed Hermione and her husband. She waved madly and got Harry and Ron’s attention. Harry was elated to see his godfather and best friend in attendance, having come to show their support.

Hermione stood on her toes and whispered in Sirius' ear, "This was such a good idea of yours." He smiled and swung his arm around her and booed loudly with the rest of the Gryffindors as the Slytherins took to the field.

The match started off well for the Slytherin team, getting three goals past a very flustered Ron within fifteen minutes of the game starting. Harry flew out to Ron and seemed to offer him some words of encouragement while the Gryffindor beaters kept a bludger from knocking Ginny off her broom. Once the match got under way again things seemed to look up for Gryffindor as Ginny got two goals past the Slytherin keeper. Hermione and Sirius watched the Slytherin seeker hover close behind Harry, hoping to outdistance him once when he saw the snitch.

As Hermione watched the match she realized how much she was missing out on. Her life was wonderful and full of love but as she looked around it hit her that her true place was here. She was mature and able to handle all that had been thrown at her but she still had been robbed. She had been forced to grow up too fast, denied the time her friends were afforded to discover who they were. That time of discovery would never be a part of her life. She felt torn between wanting and loving the life she had and wishing she could have had this normal part of her childhood. She blinked away the tears and shook off her melancholy, there was nothing she could do but live with the hand she had been dealt. She loved Sirius and was not sorry to be his wife. She looked up just as Harry caught the snitch and let herself get caught up in Sirius' infectious enthusiasm as he whooped and hollered.

After the match Hermione was overwhelmed by all the friends who greeted her, expressing to her how much they missed her and shooting shy glances at her older, famous husband. Sirius stood back and let her soak up all the attention until Harry found him and drug him around to meet all his friends, eventually making it back to Hermione. Slowly the field began to empty of students and soon there was only Harry, talking to his team. Hermione and Sirius decided to make their way back to the castle, each with their own appreciation of this place they had once called home.

“You miss this I imagine,” said Sirius, rubbing his thumb on the hand he was holding.

“I didn’t realize how much until today,” she replied, glad of the opportunity to voice what she had been feeling.

“It isn’t fair, what happened to you but you have born it remarkably well, Mrs. Black. I’m not sure that many eighteen year olds could handle what has been thrust upon you.” He wrapped his arm around her waist, hoping to lend her strength the way she had lent it to him.

The sounds of the team coming up behind them pulled them out of their conversation. Harry and Ron paused long enough to tell them they would grab their things and meet them just outside the Great Hall in fifteen minutes. Ginny pulled up along side of Hermione and walked the couple back to the castle.

“Look at you,” said Ginny. “You’re beginning to show a little.” She patted the small bulge at Hermione’s stomach. “How far along are you now?”

Hermione placed her hand on her stomach. “A little over two months.”

“Have you thought about names at all?” Ginny paused to let Sirius open the large wooden door for them.

“Some,” said Hermione with a glance at Sirius. “No luck with it yet, though.” They paused outside the Great Hall as Harry and Ron caught up with them, each with a duffle slung over an arm.

“See you next weekend,” said Ginny, before she turned away and left for Gryffindor tower.

“Ready?” Sirius glanced in the direction of Professor Dumbledore’s office and then started walking.

“What’s going on this weekend?” Harry was used to there being some amount of excitement at the couple’s home.

Hermione gave the boys a very scrutinizing look. "Studying knowing you two, just how far behind are you?" Ron gave a loud groan. Hermione took on a superior, knowing expression and tutted at their complete lack of discipline. Sirius smirked at their little exchange, remembering only too well how he had to adjust to her pushiness in Mexico.

Dumbledore was waiting for them in his office when they arrived. The last time he had seen Hermione was in St. Mungo's the day she discovered her pregnancy. Her tentative glances and look of expectant anticipation reminded him of her correspondence.

"Mrs. Black, how lovely to see you and you too, Sirius." They each greeted him in turn before he addressed her unasked question. "I expect you'll want an answer to your letter." He stepped out from behind his desk.

"I've already started preparing and I'll be at the castle next weekend, I could ask Hagrid for a tutorial if you like and as you know, I'm muggleborn so I already know a lot about muggles." She wasn't sure what his answer would be and she wanted to persuade him in case he thought she wasn't up to the task.

"I'm sure Hagrid would love the visit. My answer to your question is yes, under normal circumstance I would want a student prepared with a full year under their belt but I feel certain you are capable of learning the required material. I have here for you a summary of those things you'll need to be familiar with." He handed her two pieces of parchment which she took with a huge smile as Ron and Harry stared at her open mouthed.

"So, what...a full load just wasn't enough for you?" Ron spoke up for them both.

Hermione rolled her eyes. "It could be important to be able to prove I've studied these subjects, Ronald." She gave him a withering look.

"What on earth for?" Harry finally spoke up.

“ We’re taking up the Headmaster’s valuable time,” snapped Hermione. Sirius winced, he much preferred when she was in a good mood and didn’t appreciate the boys waspish effect on her.

Once they were home and the boys were upstairs putting their duffels in their rooms, Sirius wrapped his arms around her and placed little kisses along her neck. When she relaxed in his arms he sighed inwardly with relief. He released her to visit with the boys while she went to make sandwiches.

“I think you may actually fly better than your father,” said Sirius, pride evident in his voice.

“ Thanks, Sirius!” Harry always treasured these little positive comparisons between himself and his father. “Do you think you could take me for a ride on your motorbike this weekend?”

“Absolutely!” Sirius enthusiastically agreed to Harry’s request. “You too, Ron, how about it?” The red head nodded furiously, delighted to be included.

The sound of a cleared throat behind them turned their heads simultaneously, slowly, realizing their error. Hermione set a plate of sandwiches down and eyed Ron and Harry imperiously. “Study first,” she said, with a look of mild reproach at Sirius.

He gave her an innocent look and then pulled her into his lap when her back was turned. “Let us have a little fun, hmm?” He whispered seductively in her ear with a little nip to her throat.

For a moment she couldn’t think clearly, a delightful warm feeling spread through her. “Ok,” she said. “But they’re mine afterward.”

“You’re the boss,” he joked. “Now hand me a sandwich, witch!” The snickers heard loud and clear from Ron and Harry earned Sirius a narrowed brow and stern look. He returned a raised eyebrow in cocky challenge with a lazy knowing grin. “I have a whole bag of tricks!” He gave her a playful pinch and held her in place when she tried to leave

his lap. He continued to poke at her until she complied with his request.

Once they had finished their lunch the guys went outside to marvel at Sirius' bike. She heard the engine roar to life as she made her way down the stairs to the library. Even though she was a little behind with her increased curriculum she couldn't resist looking through her books on the Daughter's. She was quietly reading when Harry and Ron slouched down the stairs to let Hermione embrace them in her discipline. They situated comfortably and settled into their homework. Sirius followed a few minutes later, having taken a moment to polish his metal and chrome throne. He returned to the book he had been reading earlier, smirking when he caught her blushing.

"I really want to use my membership in the Daughter's to change some of the existing laws regarding muggleborns and purebloods." Hermione broke the silence in the library. "St. Mungo's Helping Hand Fund would be useless and besides, Narcissa Malfoy chairs that committee."

"From what I know of it, the Queen Maeve Benefit Fund wouldn't serve your purposes either," said Sirius thoughtfully.

"Isn't the Society for Distressed Witches a part of the Daughter's? They were all over the papers while you two were away," offered Ron.

"They exist solely to aid witches who are in dire situations and to further political change for witches in the community," replied Hermione

"I hate to say it, baby, but the Liaison to the Ministry of Magic is probably your best bet," said Sirius sympathetically.

Hermione wrinkled her nose in distaste. "I really don't know if I could do that which only leaves the Hogwarts Scholarship Fund and that doesn't do me any good either."

Hermione sighed and went back to her research on the Daughter's. She learned that each committee had its own separate meeting

where they planned fund raisers, public awareness campaigns and decided how the money would be spent. Each committee steered the larger entity which had its own membership to whom they were responsible. Not all charities in the wizarding world were represented in the Daughter's, only the fortunate few.

Hermione wondered what it took for a charity to gain backing from the Daughter's. The most recent addition was the Society for Distressed Witches. She had seen a chapter on that committee in a different book so she made the exchange and turned to the relevant chapter. She wondered if she could get enough dirt on the Daughter's with her little Delores Umbridge sponsored research project to start her own charity. The more she read the more excited she became until she got to a section that discussed how to start a charity. It took a lot of capitol to get a charity official recognition by the ministry. Unless the charity was thus legitimized it didn't stand a chance in the Daughter's. She let out a long sigh.

"What's wrong?" Sirius put his book down and gave her an interested smile.

"Nothing," she replied. "Just wishful thinking."

"And what did you wish for, sweet?" He gave her leg a playful nudge.

She shook her head. "It's ridiculous, I mean look where I got with S.P.E.W."

"You know," said Sirius catching on, "that's not a bad idea."

"What's not a bad idea," asked Harry.

"Hermione is thinking of starting a charity of her own," answered Sirius.

"What would you want it to accomplish?" Sirius knew getting her to talk about it would build her confidence.

“I guess it would need to be a watchdog group, a political lobby and a place where muggleborns with grievances could receive assistance.” Without thinking about it for very long she knew exactly what she would want.

“So, what would you call it?” Sirius thought an organization like this, run by Hermione would be a juggernaut, a force to be reckoned with.

“What about the Council to Uplift Muggleborns?” Harry was eager to take a break from studying.

Sirius shook his head. “It’s not about making anyone feel better, it’s about social change.”

Suddenly Ron sniggered. He hand a piece of parchment to Harry who promptly roared with laughter. Hermione and Sirius gave each other odd looks over their behavior. Harry handed the piece of parchment to Sirius who chuckled at what he read. He handed the piece of parchment to Hermione which had the anachronism for the proposed name written on it. C.U.M.

Hermione promptly blushed. “Well, that’s out.”

“What about Muggleborn Equality and Social Support,” tried Sirius.

“It doesn’t really have a ring to it,” commented Ron.

“Plus,” added Harry, “do you really want your charity to be called mess?”

“M.E.S.S.,” corrected Hermione. “And no, I would not. Besides, I’ve got time to figure it all out. First I need to research what it takes for a charity to get a ministry stamp of approval.”

“I could ask dad,” offered Ron.

“I think,” said Hermione as she exchanged for a different book, “that I read something about it in here earlier.” She flipped through the

book until she got to the relevant pages. To avoid studying, the boys continued to toss out potential names.

“League for the Officially Recognized Equality of Muggleborns,” supplied Harry, flipping through one of her books.

“Too long,” replied Hermione. “Although I do like Equality in the name.”

“What about Fellowship for...” Ron paused, thoughtful. “No, I don’t like that.”

“I like Fellowship,” said Hermione slowly, working out a name in her head. “Oh, I have a good one,” she said excitedly. “Fellowship for the Legalized Equality of Muggleborns.”

Sirius, Harry and Ron paused over the name for a moment and then agreed it fit nicely. Hermione wrote it out on a piece of parchment and looked at it, well pleased. Harry looked over her shoulder and then laughed loudly.

“What?” The hurt evident in her voice.

“You’ve done it again, Hermione,” he said, still laughing.

“Done what?” Annoyed and frustrated.

“Your charity is going to sound like phlegm!”

“That’s F.L.E.M., Harry!”

[illegible]

A/N: Thank you so much for the reviews!

The Twins

The crisp April morning on Diagon Alley was bustling with witches and wizards who were busy with their Saturday shopping. The hum of many people, all speaking at once in various conversations filled the air along with the soft shuffling and tapping of shoe clad feet. Shop doors could be heard opening and closing, an occasional shop bell floated out across the busy pathway. Hermione and Sirius walked hand in hand, pausing intermittently to comment on an interesting window dressing. They were on their way to the Enchanted Crib to begin their preparation of the nursery. Hermione was unusually quiet as they walked along, worrying her lower lip in nervous concentration.

“So, when do we know what we’re having?” His words pulled at her gently, tugging her out of anxious thoughts.

“Oh, uh, next week, the appointment is next week.” She blinked her eyes, clearing out the last of her fretful musings. “I thought we could get a few of the basics today, basinet, crib, pram, that sort of thing.”

She paused to peer into a bookstore window display of an award winning book on ancient runes. Sirius followed her eye line and smiled. “Want it?”

“Hmm? Oh, maybe later.” She was slipping back into her distraction.

“Nervous about tonight?” She simply nodded but didn’t add to the conversation. “Has the ministry delivered the certificate of registration yet?” He paused to open the door to the Enchanted Crib for her.

She nodded again. “This morning, I still can’t believe Umbridge got the paperwork through the system in a little over two weeks.”

Sirius grinned at her. “Amazing what a good piece of blackmail can accomplish.”

“I’m still surprised she didn’t dispose of something so vile earlier.” She paused to watch a charmed book read to a group of children and smiled, picturing her own child coming here for story time.

“That woman is mean and bigoted but not all that bright. I doubt it occurred to her that something so dangerous to the Daughter’s might exist until you brought it up.” Sirius picked up a toy stuffed dragon that puffed illusory flames from its nostrils.

Hermione fingered a set of sheets with cauldrons that appeared to bubble and brew. “Professor Snape met me at the gate to Hogwarts so I could research laws in the school library.”

“Oh?” he said cautiously. “You mean the day you had tea with Minerva?”

“The same,” she answered, with a guarded flick of her eyes, meeting his briefly. “He escorted me to the castle giving me a chance to speak with him.”

“And how is Sniv- erm, Severus?” The insult died on his lips as he remembered the service his old enemy had done for them.

“I thanked him for saving my life,” she said quietly.

“Feel better now?” He wrapped an arm around her waist.

“Much, although I don’t think he cared one way or the other.” She peered over the edge of a crib and smiled.

Sirius nodded. “I can see that. He’s always been strange.” He paused. “So, tell me, what is Minerva’s position again?”

“Madam President, she presides over the entire group. Any proposal a committee has must go through her before it gets voted on. I’m fortunate that she has chosen to endorse my brainchild. Only she can give me the floor to speak at tonight’s meeting. If one of the Chairs were backing my idea they would make my presentation and who knows what they would say.” They had come to a stop in front of a row of prams which were displaying their different charmed attributes.

“So, do they vote on it tonight?” He helped her pull one of the prams off the line so she could get a better look at it.

“Oh, no, tonight is just the presentation. I have to show proof of the ministry’s approval, account for what is in the treasury...” Sirius interrupted her.

“I took care of that yesterday, forgot to tell you.” He followed her back over to the crib section.

“Are you sure you want to donate so much?” She paused to look at him hesitantly.

“Absolutely, besides, its not that much for us.” He walked around the side of a crib, flicking his wand at it, testing its safety measures.

She decided not to argue. She knew it was an impressive start up donation and would go a long way to proving F.L.E.M.’s validity. She continued her explanation of the coming evening. “So, then the eight witches who have agreed to serve on F.L.E.M.’s committee will speak briefly...” He interrupted again.

“Wait, when do you list all those laws you found at the ministry?” They were paused at a self rocking basinet.

“During the presentation.” She took a last appraising glance at the rocking basinet and moved on to one that sang lullabies. “After tonight I have to get at least thirty three members to agree to vote for F.L.E.M.’s inclusion at the next meeting.”

“That’s going to take a lot of socializing isn’t it?” He watched as she walked back to the self rocking basinet.

“I like this one,” she said, turning the price tag over so she could read it.

“It’s nice,” he said sincerely but distracted. “Listen, are you sure you want to take on those other classes considering how busy you are? I

worry you are going to put yourself under too much stress.” His hands slid around from behind her and rested on the swell at her middle.

“I’m busy but it’s not too much, besides, I’ve already talked to Hagrid about Care of Magical Creatures. I’m good, really.” He sighed and let her go.

“There’s something I’ve been meaning to ask you.” She turned to him, giving her full attention.

“Hmm, what’s that?”

“Well, its my fault that Harry won’t have a home after graduation. How do you feel about having him move in with us?” His eyes slid away from hers, betraying the guilt he felt over robbing Harry of a home.

Hermione broke into a huge smile. “That would be wonderful!”

Sirius let out a relieved breath. “Have you, uh, ever been up to the room he stays in when he’s here?” He tried to sound as casual as possible.

Her expression puzzled. “Once or twice, why?”

“Have you ever been in the closet up there?” He followed her back over to the prams.

“No,” she answered slowly. “Why?”

Sirius fidgeted for a moment, watching her compare the same two prams as before, wondering if he really wanted to do this. Before he spoke he let the emotion he was feeling wash over him, riding it out so he wouldn’t choke on his words. “James used to live with me, before he married Lily.”

Hermione tensed, she turned around to face him, knowing that something important was about to be said in this conversation. “I didn’t know that, does Harry?”

Sirius shook his head. "No, I never told him, couldn't." He flicked his eyes at her and then away.

Hermione closed the small space between them and wrapped her arms around his waist and leaned her body into his. "What's in the closet?"

She felt him tremble slightly in her arms. "Quidditch robes." He couldn't bring himself to say that they were James'.

"What do you want to do with them?" She gave him a squeeze and then released him.

"I'm going to give them to Harry." He kept an arm around her waist.

"Are you sure? It's ok to keep them, you know." She pulled her choice of pram out of the line.

"Yeah, I know. I want to." He followed her back over to the cribs and basinet, pushing the pram for her.

"I really think we should get a crib as well," she said to break the tension.

"Oh, yeah, whatever you want, sweet." The change in topic was unexpected but appreciated.

"I miss Harry, it'll be nice having him close." She gave him a smile and turned her attention to one of the cribs.

"Should be interesting when Ginny comes to visit," he said with a chuckle.

"Not that interesting," she said dryly, her hand flew to her mouth, a blush rising on her cheeks.

“Just before Christmas you said...” He trailed off as she furiously shook her head. “You’re joking,” he said disbelieving and humorously sad.

“He let it slip accidentally,” she said with a giggle.

“Well, his father couldn’t close either.” He shook his head laughing.

“That’s crude, Sirius.” She frowned at him, disapproving.

“True,” he said in mock challenge and then tickled her.

She shied away and steadied herself on a crib. “Ginny’s not entirely happy about the situation.” She looked at him pointedly.

Sirius’ eyes flew open as it dawned on him what she was getting at. “Oh my god.”

“Godfather,” she reminded, relieved she didn’t have to spell it out. “I like this one.” She looked around the store. “I think that’s enough for today.”

“Enough indeed,” he said ruefully.

She motioned to the saleswitch who came over immediately. Once the order was placed Sirius paid her and the delivery arrangements were made. Sirius held the door for her and together they walked back out onto Diagon Alley. He put an arm around her waist and led her across the alleyway to a jewelry store. The name that hung on the sign read Gildingham’s and underneath that was written London, Hogsmeade. Hermione glanced at him questioningly.

“I’ve got to check and see if something is ready.” He held the door and followed her inside. He paused to watch her peer into the cases that were on display. He left her to speak to the young, finely dressed wizard behind the counter. His gold nametag read Antares Gildingham. “Hello, Antares,” he greeted. “Is your father here?”

The young wizard smiled and nodded. "Yes, Mr. Black, let me get him for you."

Sirius thanked the young man and looked over his shoulder at Hermione. She felt his eyes on her and looked up with a smile, there was a light flush on her cheeks. She looked like she had been caught at something she shouldn't be. He made a note of the case she was looking in and turned back around, hearing voices get louder as two wizards emerged from the back of the store.

"Hello, Sirius. What can I do for you today?" The older wizard's nametag read Algorab Gildingham.

"I came to check on that charm I brought to you about a month ago." Sirius chanced another glance at Hermione who was still at the same case.

"We just got a shipment from our workshop. Let me see if it's in." Algorab shuffled off to the back.

Sirius walked up behind Hermione and placed his hands on her hips, making her jump in surprise. "What's caught your eye, baby?"

"Just looking," she replied.

"At the same case since we walked in?" He kissed her neck before looking over her shoulder. In the center of the display was a large ruby, surrounded by diamonds, set onto a ring. "Just looking, huh?" His breath on her neck made her shiver. "That certainly is a pretty ring."

Hermione dragged herself away from the case with a last longing look. "It's ok," she said unconvincingly.

"Oh, I see. So you're not completely smitten with that ruby ring." Her let his fingers dance up her sides, tickling her softly.

"No," she said, swatting at him.

“Mr. Black.” The young wizard called from the back of the shop.

“Excuse me, sweet.” He poked at her one last time before leaving her side.

“Here we are,” said Antares as he opened a box. Inside lay the charm Sirius had given her. “When the chain was broken the charm was unaffected. It holds as strong as ever. We repaired the chain so it’s ready to go.”

Sirius looked over his shoulder and grinned. She was back at the ruby. “You see that case my wife is standing in front of?”

Antares peered around Sirius. “Yes, sir.”

“There is a ruby ring on display and she loves it. I want to give it to her as a surprise, so could you take it out of the case after we leave? I’ll pick it up next week.” Sirius waited while Antares wrote down his order and instructions.

“The ring isn’t charmed, it’s just a ring,” said Antares, explaining. He pushed a sales slip to Sirius who looked it over carefully.

“It’s not just a ring,” corrected Sirius as he wrote his account number on the slip and signed his name. “It’s a ring she loves.” He pushed the slip back to the younger man.

“Thank you for your patronage, Mr. Black,” said Antares politely.

Sirius acknowledged him with a nod as he picked up the long box and sauntered over to Hermione. “I got something for you.”

She tore her eyes away from the ring, meeting his grey eyes with her brown. “You didn’t have to.”

“Well,” he said, “technically I already gave it to you but then I royally screwed up.” He opened the box and smiled when her hands flew to her mouth.

“Oh, Sirius, I felt so bad about this.”

“Don’t,” he said, taking the necklace out of the box. “Turn around, baby,” he said softly. “I feel so much better with this on your lovely neck.”

She shivered as he his rough fingertips grazed along her neck and throat. “Thank you, Sirius.”

He turned her around and met her lips with his, soft and tender. He pulled back and looked into her eyes. “I love you and couldn’t stand it if something happened to you.”

“I love you too, Sirius.” She wrapped her arms around his neck and pulled him into another kiss.

“Do we have anymore shopping to do?” he asked before leaving little kisses on her neck. She glanced at the young wizard at the back of the shop who was smirking at the entranced couple.

“We were going to stop by WWW, remember, to say hi to Fred and George.” She pulled back and took a step away.

He pulled her right back. “Couldn’t we just skip it?” he asked, his voice husky and full of emotion.

Hermione nodded. “Absolutely.”

He took her by the hand and led her out of the shop. He pulled her close so they could Apparate when a familiar voice broke through their single minded determination. “Hello, dears,” called Mrs. Weasley from across the cobblestone pathway.

“I’ll pretend I didn’t hear her.” Partly joking, partly not.

“No,” said Hermione urgently. “Percy.”

Sirius swore under his breath. “I forgot about him,” said Sirius darkly.

“I have to tell her,” she scolded.

“I know, I know,” he muttered. “You’re in trouble when we get home.” He bit her neck and sucked at the skin. She felt an electric thrill shoot through her as Mrs. Weasley walked up. She pushed him off to compose herself.

“Hello, Molly.” Sirius pushed away his frustrated thoughts as best he could. “How have you been?”

Mrs. Weasley hugged Hermione and then stepped back to look at her critically. “Hello, Mrs. Weasley.”

Molly nodded to Sirius and then turned her attention back to Hermione. “How far along are you, Hermione?”

“Just over three months, why?” Hermione looked down at her growing belly.

“No reason,” said Mrs. Weasley, still appraising. “When is your next check up?”

“Next week,” replied Hermione unconcerned. It was like Mrs. Weasley to fuss over her.

“I read the article in the Prophet about, oh, what was it called...” Molly trailed off trying to remember the name.

“Fellowship for the Legalized Equality of Muggleborns,” supplied Sirius.

“How in Merlin’s name did you get it up and running so fast?” Molly motioned toward some benches where they could sit and talk.

“Well,” said Hermione, taking her seat. “I backed Umbridge, who is the Chairwitch on the Liaison to the Ministry of Magic for the Daughter’s, into a corner over that fiasco a few weeks ago, you remember.” Molly nodded and let her continue. “She gave me access

to all documents that L.M.O.M. had sent to the ministry for consideration.”

Molly raised her eyebrows. “How did you know she wouldn’t destroy them?”

“Magical contract,” replied Hermione.

“So, what did you find?” asked Molly cautiously with a sense of foreboding.

“A fair number of things but one in particular was very, very bad. It was dated just days after the ministry fell and had been signed off by one ministry official. There is no way the Daughter’s can claim they weren’t pushing it pretty hard.” Hermione was starting to talk faster and faster as she neared the climax of her story. “Bellatrix and Narcissa were the authors of the proposed law which would legalize the enslavement of muggles and muggleborns.”

“Slavery?” Mrs. Weasley said the word doubtfully. “How successful would that have been?”

“Doesn’t matter,” answered Hermione. “It’s not the ministry that has something to lose on that one, it’s the Daughter’s.”

“So are you going to quit the Daughter’s to focus on this new charity?” asked Mrs. Weasley.

“Oh, no,” said Hermione. “I’m going to get it added to the Daughter’s.”

“A brand new charity with Daughter’s endorsement?” She flicked her eyes worriedly at Sirius knowing how much work that was going to take. They exchanged a grim look of worry.

“I’ve got try,” answered Hermione. “There is one more thing that Umbridge did for me. She got me access to ministry’s law library and I saw someone there.”

“Who was that, dear?”asked Molly.

“Percy,” replied Hermione.

Molly stiffened, sitting up a little straighter, her lips pursed. “Oh.”

“He’s really sorry, Mrs. Weasley. He just doesn’t know how to reconnect. He’s afraid of rejection.” Hermione placed a cautious hand on Mrs. Weasley’s arm.

“You mean like he rejected us?” Hermione looked away as Mrs. Weasley struggled to maintain composure. Sirius conjured a handkerchief and handed it o Mrs. Weasley so she could dab her eyes. She took a long shuddering breath before looking up. “It has been lovely to see you both.” Mrs. Weasley’s lower lip quivered.

“You too, Molly,” said Sirius in a comforting tone. Hermione threw her arms around Mrs. Weasley and hugged her tightly. The older woman patted her arm, stood up and gave them both a tight smile before walking away in the direction of WWW.

Sirius scooted over on the bench to sit next to Hermione, throwing his arm around her shoulders. They watched Mrs. Weasley’s retreating back in silence, each affected by the emotion of the moment they had just experienced. “Ready to go home?”

“Maybe we should visit Fred and George,” she said, resting her head on his shoulder.

“Sirius!” A man’s voice called out from a few shops down.

Sirius looked up, saw who it was and then took a guilty sideways glance at Hermione before placing a hand on her knee. “That’s Dawlish, there’s something I need to speak to him about. Why don’t you look around and meet me back here in fifteen minutes.”

Hermione glanced at Dawlish who had recently been named head of the Auror’s Department. “I just recently read about him in the Prophet. I wonder what he wants.”

“I’ll tell you about it at home. Just give me a minute to chat with him.” He waited for her to nod before getting up to meet with the other wizard.

Hermione watched him walk away, wondering what that could be about. She stood up and walked down the alleyway. For a moment she thought maybe Sirius wanted to be an Auror. She shook her head. Sirius hated the idea of working for someone, although he had seemed a little bored lately. The thought of him working as an Auror gave her a chill. It was dangerous work and the hours weren’t always good.

The number of people along Diagon Alley had thinned considerably as the lunch hour drew to a close. Her stomach grumbled at her for not feeding it since breakfast. She looked over her shoulder at Sirius. She could just make him out, still in a conversation with Dawlish. It worried her, the thought of Sirius working as an Auror. She continued walking along, not looking at any of the window displays that she passed. She realized there were very few reasons why he would need to speak to Dawlish.

Engrossed in her thoughts, Hermione didn’t realize how close she was to Knockturn Alley. Neither did she see a blond head turn the corner and narrow eyes at her. When her arm was roughly yanked she let out a loud scream, more in surprise than in fear. She was pulled onto Knockturn Alley and shoved hard against the wall, hitting the back of her head against the bricks. She whimpered in pain and tried to struggle free. Realizing where she was and the amount of danger she was in she screamed Sirius’ name before a hand clamped over her mouth.

“Think a lot of yourself lately, don’t you mudblood?” Hermione felt sticky warmth on the back of her head and grasped that she must be bleeding. She looked into Draco’s eyes, shocked by the raw hatred she saw there. “I know better, don’t I?”

“My husband will kill you if he gets his hands on you.” Her voice gave away her fear and pain.

“When I think that the same blood that flows in my veins is tainted with yours in that whelp you are carrying it makes me want to vomit.” He spat in her face making her sob in shock. “We’ll just have to do something about that.” Draco gave her a hard push to the ground, causing her to fall on her stomach.

“Please don’t,” she begged, curling herself into a ball. Draco kicked at her, missing her stomach, catching her in the side instead. Hermione howled in pain, clutching her side.

Sirius and Dawlish rounded the corner and rushed toward Draco. Sirius got to him first, slamming him into the wall. “I WILL KILL YOU FOR TOUCHING HER!” He raised a fist and made contact with the blond’s nose before raising his wand against Draco, a barely human look of rage contorted his features.

“Sirius.” Her weak voice, heavy with pain, pulled at him. Dawlish pulled Sirius off of Draco roughly and then bound the blond. Sirius knelt down beside her, struggling between wanting to make Draco pay and helping her. “He tried to kill the baby, Sirius.”

He picked her up in his arms and felt the blood from the back of her head, releasing a low growl. He turned in time to see Dawlish releasing Draco. “What the fuck, Dawlish!”

“I’m sorry, Sirius. He didn’t use magic, there is nothing I can charge him with.” Dawlish looked murderous. “It’s an old law that has never been taken off the books. If a pureblood injures a muggleborn without the use of magic, it’s not a crime.”

“He’s right, Sirius,” said Hermione, her voice weak and hitched with pain.

“We’re going to St. Mungo’s,” said Sirius in a tight, angry voice before he spun on the spot. He rushed her to the fourth floor because he knew Stromwell would see her right away. He burst onto the floor and started yelling for Stromwell.

She erupted out of a patient's room, furious until she saw the blood on the back of Hermione's head. She motioned for Sirius to follow her as she opened an empty room. "What happened?"

"Draco Malfoy. He pushed me against a brick wall, that's when I hit my head. Then he pushed me down and kicked me in the side." She watched Sirius carefully. He hadn't lost the dangerous glimmer in his eyes. A muscle in his jaw jumped as he clenched his teeth. His face reddened with the rage he was struggling to control.

"Let's look you over." Stromwell lifted her shirt over her head. She was covered in scrapes and bruises on one side but the worst of it was on the other side. Underneath her ribcage was a large, dark bruise. Sirius let out a strangled groan of dismay. "Have you informed the Aurors of this?"

"An Auror was with me when I found her." He stroked his hand over her hair. "I'm so sorry I let you out of my sight. I should have known you'd be a target."

"Sirius, this is not your fault. I won't always be near you." She leaned her head into his hand. "What we need to do is change the law."

"Let's lay you back," said Stromwell, helping Hermione down on the exam table. She waved her wand over her stomach, causing two balls of light to glow brightly underneath the skin. "You're a bit banged up but the babies are fine." Stromwell smiled at the couple, giving them a moment to take in what she had said.

"Wait," said Sirius, "did you say babies because I think you meant baby." He turned away from Hermione to face the healer.

"Nope, you're having twins." It warmed her heart to see them twine their fingers together.

"Twins?" Hermione's voice was soft but steady.

“That’s right,” said Stromwell with a large smile. “Do you want to know the sex?”

“We’re going to need a different pram,” said Hermione reasonably.

“That’s what you think of to say?” Sirius turned to her in amusement.

Hermione touched her belly, rubbing her hand over it. “Are they fraternal or identical?”

“I’ll go get the potions.” Stromwell left the room, closing the door behind her with a click.

Sirius lay his hand on her stomach, leaned in and caught her lips in a soft, tender kiss. “You are going to be huge,” he teased.

“Sirius, don’t,” she whined. “You’re going to think I’m fat and disgusting. You won’t want to touch me anymore.”

“What? Of course I will. Hell, every time I even think about you being pregnant with my child.” He paused to grin at her. “Erm, correction, children, I want you so much I can’t think straight.” To make his point he took her hand to touch his hardening length.

“Is that why-” he interrupted her.

“Yes.” The intensity in his gaze held her transfixed as the room fell away, time stood still and they were the only two who had ever or would ever, exist. They began to move toward one another in predictable fashion when reality knocked politely and entered the room. Hermione snatched her hand back, blushing hotly, hoping the healer hadn’t caught her feeling up her husband.

“Alright,” said Stromwell, with a smirk at Sirius. He just grinned, unabashed by her discovery. Hermione caught the interchange and wanted to disappear. “This will feel a little cold.” She poured a small amount of liquid into her hand and rubbed it on Hermione’s belly. The healer studied the reaction of the potion, taking notes. “Fraternal.”

She cleaned the potion off of Hermione's belly. "Do you want to know the sex?"

Hermione glanced at Sirius who nodded. "Yes, please."

Another potion and another observation, this time taking longer. Hermione reached for Sirius who took her hand in his. Stromwell looked up from her work and smiled. "One of each."

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Hermione and Sirius returned home to find Remus, Tonks, Arthur and Molly waiting for them in the family room. The news of the attack had spread like wildfire while they were at St. Mungo's. Dawlish had returned to the ministry in a foul temper, frustrated at having his hands tied.

"Dawlish told us about that infernal law. The whole Department of Magical Law Enforcement is in an uproar over it," said Arthur tightly, watching his wife fuss over Hermione.

"Dawlish told us something else," said Tonks with a wild grin.

Sirius shook his head. "Not after this."

"What?" Remus looked at his friend in surprise. "Why?"

Sirius cleared his throat. "Hermione said something today that stuck with me." Hermione looked over at him, wondering what that was. "She said we need to change the law and she was right. Arthur, will you let Kingsley know that I need to speak with him about my hereditary seat." With her head tilting slightly to the side, Hermione smiled at him softly. He really would do anything for her. The reaction in the room was that of great surprise.

"Damn," said Tonks sadly. Sirius shot her a look of warning.

"What's wrong?" Hermione touched Tonks' hand.

There was still unresolved tension between the two witches. Tonks' hand twitched causing Hermione to draw back. "Nothing," she muttered.

The grandfather clock chimed, Hermione looked up to check the time. "Oh, god! The Daughter's is in an hour!"

"You're not still going," said Sirius incredulously.

"I have to," she returned, firmly. She wasn't going to argue this point.

"How about we share our news before you go get ready," he said resignedly.

"Oh, yes," she said, almost whispering.

"News?" Remus looked at Sirius curiously.

"While we were at St. Mungo's," said Sirius to the room, his eyes locked with hers. "We found out that we're having twins. A boy and a girl."

He tore his eyes away from her to look at Remus. His childhood friend was still the only one who could completely understand why moments like these scared Sirius. Happiness terrified him because he'd had so little of it and now that he did, he had trouble believing in it. Remus understood because he felt it too. In that moment of visual connection and reassurance Sirius was settled. His gaze slid back to Hermione who was waiting for him to return to her. "You better get ready, sweet."

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Hermione returned home a few hours later, thoroughly exhausted from her day, ready to fall into her bed and snuggle close to Sirius. She stepped through the fireplace into the living room to find Remus and Arthur were still there and had been joined by Kingsley. The four men stood as she entered, looking tired and worn out.

“How did it go,” asked Sirius, taking her hand and guiding her to a seat next to him.

“I think it went well. I’ll have to talk to Cliodna about a donation from the Queen Maeve Benefit Fund and then of course I’ll need to talk thirty three witches into voting for F.L.E.M.” She leaned into him heavily.

“I think we’re good here,” said Sirius to Arthur and Kingsley. “We can talk more next week.” The two men said their goodbyes to Hermione only to find she had fallen asleep next to Sirius.

As soon as the men left Remus spoke. "If you go after Draco you will kill him. I know because if it were Dora I would, so let it alone."

“You should see the bruise, Moony. He kicked her!” Sirius’ character changed completely. The dangerous, angry man who was allowed to slumber most of the time was roused into full wakefulness.

“I didn’t know that,” said Remus quietly.

“If I run across him I AM killing him. I’ll transfigure him into a rock and dump him in the Black Lake.” Sirius stroked her hair gently. “She could have lost the babies, hell, he could have killed her. What if she runs across him again?”

Remus said nothing for several long moments because he couldn't. He'd do the same and he knew it. "For the sake of your wife and children," Remus looked up at Sirius, meeting his eye. "Don't get caught."

“I won’t.”

[illegible]

A/N: Thank you so much for the reviews!

I have tried to keep my chapters to a week at a time, sometimes deviating to focus on a specific day or set of days in greater detail. Now I will be making larger jumps in time. I will be covering the events that happen over a month at least, perhaps more.

Family

NC17

Sirius fidgeted uncomfortably in his chair and ran a hand through his dark locks. The underground chamber that housed the Wizengamut was warm and had the slightly oily smell of too many people in too small a space. He had lost track of what any of the speakers had been saying over the last four hours. They were wrestling over a minute piece of law concerning a tiny percentage increase in the tax code and Sirius couldn't care less. He had already made up his mind to go with whichever side had the most votes in order to get it over with.

His first day on the Wizengamut confirmed every belief he had ever had about it. They were a bunch of inflated elitists who made decisions for people they didn't really care about. The main interest for these witches and wizards, he concluded, was the power, the social standing and the influence that came with their jobs. He knew almost everyone in this place except for a few of the younger ones and didn't care for most of them. Sirius Black had died and gone to hell.

Life had gotten a little too predictable for Sirius and this was no cure for it. He wasn't the stay at home type, although he loved his home and the family he was growing. He had nearly become an Auror last month, had agreed to take the job Dawlish offered but then rescinded when the incident with Draco took place. Sirius looked up, startled, at the banging of a gavel. The Wizengamut was going into recess until the next day. He groaned at the thought of day after day of this tedium. His eyes focused on a couple of approaching wizards and smiled when he recognized two faces from his less reputable days.

"You old scoundrel, never thought I'd see you in these halls. First marriage and now this, you are turning into quite the respectable wizard." The taller of the two wizards greeted Sirius first.

“Merak Higgs! Who are you to call anyone a scoundrel?” Sirius stood up and shook his friend’s hand. Merak smiled and laughed as the other wizard stepped forward to offer his greeting.

“How’s the old ball and chain, Sirius?” The shorter wizard grinned cheekily at Sirius.

“My wife,” admonished Sirius, “is very well, about four and a half months along now.”

The two wizards looked at each other shocked. “Did you hear that, Seginus? Our Sirius is to be a father!”

“Well, this occasion deserves a pint!” exclaimed Merak.

“Indeed!” agreed Seginus.

“Leakey Cauldron?” offered Sirius. His friends agreed happily, clapping Sirius merrily on the back. The three of them set out to catch up with each other and reminisce about wilder times together.

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Hermione sat atop Sirius’ lap, grinding her crotch against the bulge in his pants. Sirius released a low moan and grinned wickedly at her. This was just what he needed to wash the taste of the Wizengamut out of his mouth. He was saddened at the pub when his friend’s conversation had turned to the day’s proceedings and not on things of a more amusing nature. He grabbed her hips and rubbed her harder against his thickness while he pushed up. She mewed her approval and ran her nails down his hard, strong chest.

“Something smells good,” he said, referring to the dinner she had been cooking when he arrived home.

“Yes, my parents are coming for dinner, don’t you remember?” She leaned forward to whisper the words like an endearment and then nibbled at his neck.

“We’d better hurry then, don’t you think?” He ran his hands from her hips to possessively grab her arse.

“They’ll be here any minute, my love.” She smiled against his neck and then bit him tenderly.

“You little tease,” he growled. “Whatever happened to that innocent young witch who would never dream of such a thing?”

“Your fault, you know. You’ve no one to blame but yourself.” She moved to pull back so she could get off his lap but he pulled her back and flipped her over so that her back was against the couch. His body held her in place although he was careful not to put too much pressure on her belly.

“You’re asking for trouble, witch.” The lecherous gleam in his eye was almost sinister.

“You know, I really, really am.” She bucked her hips trying to gain some friction despite the belly which was in the way.

Sirius was about to say something but the doorbell rang, she challenged him with a raised eyebrow. Reluctantly he raised up off of her and stood up. He gave her a hand and helped her up. As she walked away from him to the door he smacked her arse with a loud ‘pop.’ She yelped and glared at him from over her shoulder, the look he returned was completely unapologetic. He adjusted his robes to hide his discomfort and sighed heavily.

He watched as Hermione let her parents in and greeted them warmly, inviting them to join him in the family room. Her father smiled at his son-in-law and took him up on his invitation while Hermione’s mother joined her daughter in the kitchen. The four of them hadn’t had a chance to share a meal in over a month. Once Herman was seated, Sirius looked around him to glance at his wife. He was surprised to see her staring straight at him with a devilish gleam in her eye. She licked her lips and turned to her mother who had just asked her a question.

“I understand you’ve been busy but can’t you try and squeeze in a little more time for me?” Jean was hurt because she hadn’t seen much of Hermione lately.

“Mum, I love you,” said Hermione in exasperated tones, “but the last month has been crazy.”

“You still haven’t told me with what.” Jean looked over her shoulder at Hermione while mashing the potatoes.

“Well,” said Hermione, praying for patience. “In between studying for my NEWTs, which are in a month, I served tea to a group of ladies so that I could pitch my charity and hopefully earn their vote, which, incidentally, happens to be tomorrow. I also went to a committee meeting of the Society for Distressed Witches, attended the Queen Maeve gala and met with the Chairwitch on the Hogwarts Scholarship Fund and two of her committee members. I have twenty eight confirmed votes with about eight who are still on the fence and so I don’t know if I’ll get the needed thirty three. I promise, I will make more time for you once I have taken my NEWTs.”

Her mother eyed her critically. “No wonder you look so tired. You need to slow down if you can, you’re pregnant, you need to take it easy.”

“You’re right mum, pregnant women should take it easy.” Jean Granger wasn’t totally satisfied with the rather foggy answer but she was placated for the moment. She helped her daughter by setting dinner out while Hermione took the men’s drink orders.

Hermione stood in front of Sirius who was seated on the couch while her father stood up and meandered into the dining room. Once his back was turned she leaned over Sirius like she was going to hug him. He put his arms out and pulled her into him. She looked over her shoulder to make sure her parents were occupied with each other. She rubbed her hand over his length and nibbled his ear lobe. She whispered in his ear. “As soon as they leave I am going to-.” She was interrupted by her mother who was calling them to the table.

He grabbed her arm firmly and gave her a sinful smile. "You think you're clever, teasing me this way but they have to leave sometime, pet, and then that pretty little arse is mine."

"Maybe I'll invite them to spend the night." She fluttered her eyelashes at him innocently.

"So?" he said with an amused chuckle. "I'm pretty handy with a Silencing Charm."

Just to prove his lack of fear, he set her on her feet, stood up and grabbed her arse and squeezed hard while her father was turned toward them. Hermione took in a shocked breath of air. He strutted past her into the dining room and flirted with her mother while sending heated looks her way. Her father just smiled at the pair because he was used to the games that his daughter didn't think he knew about.

While trying to maintain polite dinner conversation, Sirius had to endure the young hand that crept farther and farther up his thigh. Her action was hidden by the table and the fact that her parents didn't pay close attention to where their daughter's hand strayed. He was rather entertained by her torture which she was fond of when either her parents or Mrs. Weasley came for a visit. She could get away with naughty behavior without the immediate repercussions that would surely take place if they were alone. When their guests finally did leave he was a beast and she had discovered on their honeymoon that she rather liked that side of him. Sirius grappled with keeping focused on the conversation and not his desire to kick out their guests and fuck his wife within an inch of her life.

"I got a chance to talk to quite a few members at the Queen Maeve gala last week and also secured a donation for F.L.E.M. from the Queen Maeve Benefit Fund." Hermione inched her hand ever closer to Sirius' throbbing organ.

"That donation was fairly important, wasn't it, sweet?" Sirius had to clear his throat to speak more clearly.

“Vital, actually, without it my charity had no chance at all.” Hermione drummed her fingers lightly on Sirius’ thigh.

“We’re very proud of all the hard work you’ve been doing, Pumpkin,” said Herman, fondly and then more business like to Sirius. “I understand you have been busy as well, Sirius.”

“Yes, I have,” replied Sirius, “I’m sure Hermione has informed you of the incident that took place a month ago?”

“Dreadful! Absolutely horrid what that young man did to a pregnant woman. I’m so pleased with the action you are taking to abolish the law.” Herman looked at Hermione sympathetically. “It’s lucky that you didn’t lose the babies.”

“Luck had little to do with it,” said Sirius, pointing to the charm at Hermione’s neck. “This is supposed to protect against spell damage but I believe it protected her and the twins against physical damage as well. It is very old, very rare and full of protective magic.”

“How was your first day?” asked Jean, taking a closer look at the charm.

“To be honest, ghastly, I’ve never been more hopelessly bored in all my life, not even when I was shut up in my family’s home. Azkaban hardly prepared me for four hours of old, fat windbags droning on about I can’t remember what.” Sirius remembered how close to more exciting employment he had come, only to have it snatched away and replaced with his current miserable occupation. “I do have a bit of good news, though.”

“Really? What’s that?” asked Hermione brightly.

“I made a bargain with Kingsley when I agreed to take my seat. I’ve accepted the reparations the ministry has been trying to give me. Instead of paying me they are going to make a sizeable donation to F.L.E.M.” Sirius had been looking forward to giving her this piece of news.

“Are, are you serious?” He raised an eyebrow at the obvious invitation to a cheeky retort. She pushed his shoulder playfully, his thigh forgotten. “How much?”

“Five hundred thousand galleons and a building in London you can use as F.L.E.M.’s headquarters.” He thought it hardly a fair amount for what he suffered through and was a good deal less than he personally had in Gringott’s but it would greatly help Hermione. Hermione squeaked speechlessly and then threw her arms around him. “You’re welcome, sweet,” he said affectionately.

“So, are you any closer to picking out names for the twins?” asked Jean.

“We’ve each been thinking about it but just haven’t had a chance to put our heads together,” answered Sirius, with a hitch at the end as a small hand was once again inching along his thigh.

“No time like the present,” said Jean, smartly.

“Alright,” said Hermione, “I found a pretty one for a girl the other day, Arrakis.”

“No,” said Sirius, trying to ignore the hand that was so very close to its target.

“What! Why?” asked Hermione, affronted, giving his thigh a squeeze.

“Arrakis is the dancer,” replied Sirius, suppressing a moan.

“So?” Another inch closer to his pulsing, hot cock.

“Bloody hell, woman!” His comment directed more to her teasing hand and less to the unacceptable name. “We may as well name her Sugar Quill and be done with it,” he answered sarcastically, in an attempt to recover from his outburst.

“Fine, fine, your turn, then.” Her hand crept ever forward along his thigh, earning a dark look of frustration from Sirius.

“Mimosa,” offered Sirius, struggling to keep his mind clear from her sensual torture.

Jean Granger shook her head. “That’s the name of a cocktail.”

“What about Porrima?” supplied Hermione, glancing at her parents as she moved her hand a little closer.

Sirius let out a bark like laugh. “I was rather good at Astronomy, Hermione.”

“It’s the name of a goddess,” she whined.

“Oh, yes, the goddess of childbirth. Are you trying to do me in?” he asked, with double meaning. “It’s hard enough trying to imagine being father to a girl without shutting her away from the world. And now you coming up with suggestive names for her.” Sirius shook his head.

“That’s hardly suggestive,” protested Hermione, finally reaching her goal and rubbing lightly.

Sirius ignored her protest but not her hand, fighting against the urge to buck his hips. “How about Electra?”

“Now there is the name of a dancer if I ever heard one,” said Hermione snarkily.

“What about Shaula?” tried Sirius, his breathing getting a little sharper.

“The scorpion’s tail?” Hermione wondered if he could be trusted with the naming of a girl.

“Why don’t you try out a few boys names,” suggested Herman.

“I’ve thought of a few,” said Sirius. “What about Aladfar?”

“Well, I’m not familiar with that one but it’s a little awkward sounding.” Hermione shook her head, dismissing the name, still lightly rubbing his length.

“Well, then I thought of Saiph, the sword.” Sirius thought that was a good, strong name for a boy.

“You do like names with an edge to them.” Hermione laughed and then snorted at her own joke, blushing.

Sirius chuckled at his silly wife and shook his head. “The last one I thought of was Sargas, the weapon of the god of war.” He took a sharp breath as the hand on his cock gave a little squeeze.

“Another weapon? Can we please move away from things that maim or kill?” Hermione gave him a look of aggravated incredulity. “I thought of Altair, the flying one.”

“Altair James Black.” Sirius tried the name out. “Well, I don’t hate it. Can I mull it over a bit?”

Hermione smiled and nodded. “Of course.”

“On that note,” said Jean getting up and patting her husband on the shoulder. “We should get going.” Hugs and promises to get together again soon were shared as Hermione and Sirius walked her parents to the door.

Once the door was closed Hermione returned to the dining room to clear away the dishes. She was spun roughly around by Sirius who wore a look of feral lust. “Like your little game, love?”

“Yes,” she whispered, a heated thrill coursing through her body.

He knew exactly what she wanted, what she needed, why she teased him to this point. He took a hold of both sides of her blouse and ripped it open, sending buttons everywhere. His mouth made contact

with her neck, biting the soft skin aggressively while he pushed the shirt off of her shoulders. Her cry was part pleasure, part pain as he walked her backwards and then released her and turned her around. His lust addled brain reasoned just enough to give her a little shove toward the bedroom, keeping her pregnancy in mind. "Get in the bed," he said roughly.

She scampered in that direction removing articles of clothing as she went so as not to have them ruined as well. He entered the bedroom with purpose and strode toward the bed and upon reaching her, ripped her knickers off, forcing a yelp from her mouth, leaving red marks where the fabric had once clung to her body. "Sirius!" He pushed her down and leaned over her, one knee on the bed, the other foot on the floor. His coarse fingers entered her roughly, already pumping hard in and out while his demanding thumb rubbed against her clit. She hiccupped and mewed, her breath coming faster and her cries growing louder as he rushed her towards her first climax. "Oh, god...don't stop...oh, yesssss..."

He showed her no mercy for this is what she had spent the afternoon begging for. Her body jumped and jolted as she was forced closer and closer to her orgasm and then it hit. She called to him loudly, their eyes locked together as she convulsed around his fingers. He slid them out of her heat and licked them, savoring her flavor. "Love the way you taste, kitten."

He gave her no time to recover, needing to be joined with her, needing to feel his cock enveloped in her heat. He opened his pants enough to release his aching, weeping cock from its confines. He performed the same spell on himself from their honeymoon and then flipped her over, ramming his length into her, forcing a loud, rough moan from her lips. "You like it rough, don't you?"

He took a firm grip on her hips, pulling her arse up, bruising the flesh and then roughly plunging into her, over and over. He reached around to find and then twist her clit in his fingers. "Come, witch!" he commanded. His lip curled in a sadistic smile as he felt her come for the second time. He rode her orgasm, his head thrown back, almost unable to bear the pleasure but forcing himself to anyway.

He flipped her again, this time tossing both her legs over his shoulder and entered again, rough, almost vicious, mad with desire and the inability to come. He lay claim to her body with dominance and power, a look of primacy and raw lust that would have frightened some but thrilled her. "My witch, mine to fuck!" he grunted out.

"Yes, Sirius! Yours!" A steady stream of encouragements incited him to take her as he pleased. His fingers dug into her arse, his pelvis working like a piston, sliding his long, hard shaft in and out with high velocity. Hermione's fingers clung to the sheets as her body was pushed once again toward its completion. Sweat dripped from every pore, eyes on each other, breaths becoming labored and calls to each other getting louder. "So close...don't stop..." Her body was strung tight as he forced her closer and closer to the edge, urging her to leap. The first soft waves and she wasn't sure if it was happening and then deeper and harder as he lovingly brutalized her body. A guttural half scream was ripped from her lungs as she hit her peak and then whispering his name as it washed out on the other side. He muttered the counterspell and came hard as he always did when she pushed him this way, her name leaving his lips in a loud roar. They took in great gasping breaths as their bodies calmed back down.

Still connected by his softening member, he leaned over her and kissed her gently. "I love you so much.

"I love you, too." She let out a last shuddering sigh.

"Are you alright?" He always worried that he pushed her too hard.

"I'm wonderful, I really needed that." She smiled at him from under heavily, lidded eyes.

"Good." He gave her a last, lingering kiss and then rolled to the side. His warm flesh slid out of her body followed by a flood of comingled sexual excretions. He rolled them away from the wet spot and curled his body around hers, tenderly kissing her face and neck and shoulders. They lay together, softly caressing and kissing each other, embraced in the warm aftermath of their lovemaking. It was a good ten minutes before either of them spoke.

“Harry is coming tomorrow. Ron is staying at Hogwarts this time so he can see a little more of Hannah before the summer hols.” Hermione’s head rested on Sirius’ arm, her fingers lazily tracing the tattoos on his chest.

“Good, that’s good. We can talk to him about moving in with us.” His fingers played absently with a breast.

“Tomorrow I’ve got the big meeting with the Daughter’s and the day after that we have our first committee meeting here if all goes according to plan.” Hermione was starting to feel the pressure of all she was trying to achieve.

“Mmm hmm,” murmured Sirius, who was starting to fall asleep. Hermione smiled and snuggled deep into his arms, letting sleep take her too.

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Hermione and Sirius were sitting together on one of their couches across from Harry who was feeling a little nervous. They had asked him to join them in the family room so they could talk to him about something important. Sirius had one arm stretched across the back of the couch, the other hand on Hermione's thigh, drawing strength from her. He had never fully addressed the burning of number twelve, Grimmauld Place with Harry, never apologized for taking the home that he had given to his godson. When Sirius returned from the Veil, Harry gave back Sirius' fortune down to the last knut. Sirius had every intention of returning to this home after the war and insisted Harry keep the home he had never wanted.

Hermione was rather excited about asking Harry to move in with them. She sorely missed his company and the prospect of reconnecting was appealing to her. She knew that Sirius was nervous about this conversation, feelings of guilt came easily to Sirius, and this present situation was no different. The silence in the room began to stretch uncomfortably while Sirius gathered his thoughts. Harry wore a

worried expression believing that nothing this hard to say could be good news.

“So, Harry,” began Hermione, “have you been studying for your NEWTs? They are only a month away.”

“I feel pretty good about it. I’ve already got my application for the academy all filled out.” Harry was relieved she had broken the growing tension in the room.

“You’re still set on being an Auror?” asked Hermione, she leaned into Sirius a little, hoping to impart some comfort to him.

“Yeah, I don’t think I ever considered anything else,” replied Harry, glancing at Sirius who was still silent, staring at the hand on Hermione’s thigh.

“After graduation,” said Sirius quietly, without looking up, “Hermione and I would like you to move in with us. You can stay here as long as you like.”

Harry felt the last of the tension drain off, understanding immediately what was bothering Sirius. His godfather was a proud man and the coming apology was going to be difficult for him. “That would be really great! I wouldn’t need a place for very long if I get accepted to the academy.”

His forty years and abuse in Azkaban were rarely evident anymore. He normally felt and looked younger than he had in years, energetic and passionate the way he had once been. The young man who had been lost to the world had been given a second chance. Occasionally though, Sirius reverted to the haunted man he had been, the dark shadows taking precedence in his mind once again. Sirius raised his head to face Harry, a miserable look of guilt and shame colored his face, the hollows under his eyes stood out, pronounced and sad.

“I’m sorry, Harry,” he croaked out, the words dripping with remorse, shame and criticism.

Harry shook his head. "I remember that day, Sirius. You weren't yourself, you thought Hermione was going to die and your mum's portrait pushed you, making out like it was amusing for her."

Tears fell from Hermione's eyes as she remembered what Remus had showed her in the pensieve. She had been in the hospital, close to death, when Sirius had torched his family's ancestral home. The power of his grief moved her then and it moved her now. She didn't fully understand then what she did now, that their union had a healing effect on him. Losing her meant a return to pain and loss and loneliness. She placed her hand over his and rested her head on his shoulder, wetting it with her tears.

"It doesn't excuse..." Harry interrupted Sirius, his voice slightly raised, his tone confident and self assured.

"No, it doesn't excuse anything Sirius but you've got to quit feeling guilt for this." Harry chuckled warmly and with great affection for his godfather. "Besides, when I think about all the renovation that place would have required, you may have actually done me a favor." Sirius could feel Hermione shaking lightly with mirth.

Sirius gave Harry a sarcastic smile but whatever comment he was considering, it never made it out of his mouth. His godson's words removed some of his broodiness, his countenance lightened and a more genuine smile returned to his face. He noticed for the first time that his shoulder was wet and turned his head to look at Hermione. She had yet to wipe the tears from her cheeks and her eyes were puffy and red. She looked at him, looking at her, and smiled.

"What's this?" he asked gently, tilting her head so he could wipe away the tears.

She flicked her eyes to Harry, unsure if she wanted to have such a private moment in front of him. "I-I was remembering that day, the day when I learned what I'd forgotten, when we used the pensieve."

“Mmm, hmm. What about that day did you just remember?” With both of his hands gently cupping her face and his soulful grey eyes gazing intently on her, everything else fell away.

“You wanted to die,” she whispered, distress edging into her voice. “You thought I would be dead when you returned to the hospital and so you wanted to join me and...” She left the whisper behind but still spoke in a soft, anguished voice. “...and, and w-when I think about that, about you w-wanting to die...” the tears began to fall again, “...over me, w-watching you t-tear yourself apart b-because of me...” Overcome, she couldn’t finish her sentence. She fell into quiet sobs and was pulled into warm and comforting arms. Sirius and Harry exchanged a look, asking Harry for a moment of patience which was gladly granted. Sirius held her tightly to him and said nothing, enduring the course of her emotion because he was the cause of it. Her body stilled and lay quietly in his arms for several minutes before she spoke. “What if something were to happen to me now? What of you?”

“I was very, very angry and not in my right mind, baby. I was furious with myself for not checking out that ring more carefully, I was furious with my mother’s portrait for speaking about you that way.” He tipped her head to look at him. “I’m sorry I tried to leave you. I will never again lose hope while there is still hope to be had.”

Hermione nodded and as she did she caught sight of Harry and remembered they had an audience. He was smiling at the pair, not looking as uncomfortable as she thought he might be. Harry had apparently done some growing up in the last few months that she had missed out on. She returned his smile and straightened herself up.

“So, when do you want me to move in?” asked Harry, releasing some of the tension in the room.

“You can start leaving your stuff here now if you want,” said Sirius. “Once your year is over we’ll go to your aunt and uncles and get the rest of your stuff.”

“You’re going to go with me to the Dursley’s?” Harry’s voice was awed with just a tinge of malice.

“I’m not so sure that’s a good idea,” interjected Hermione, hoping for reason.

“No, not good...brilliant! That’s a bloody brilliant idea,” said Harry, gleeful and mischievous.

Sirius patted Hermione on the knee, curbing whatever she might think of to say next. “C’mon, Harry. Let’s go have a look at your room.” He stood up and smiled wistfully at Hermione, communicating to her that he was going to give Harry his father’s robes. She returned his smile and then waggled her eyebrows at him, reminding him of that other conversation he needed to have with Harry.

Sirius tromped up the stairs, followed closely behind by Harry. They paused at the nursery, entering the room so Harry could have a look around. The walls were painted in pastel yellow and the room was filled with all the furnishings a young family might need. There was one crib, magically enlarged to accommodate two babies. A mobile swung around with unicorns that swished their tails and shook their manes and dragons which flapped their wings and blew flames that looked so real you could almost feel the heat. There was a changing table that never ran out of diapers and a diaper pail that Vanished its contents when the lid was closed. A large pram stood in one corner and two basinetts lay next to it. A small bookshelf, which was already half full, sat over a small dresser.

“We’ve still got a lot to buy, that’s what Hermione tells me anyway,” said Sirius, looking around the room which had seemed so large only a few weeks ago.

“How much stuff do baby’s need?” asked Harry with a wry grin.

Sirius shrugged his shoulders. “Loads, apparently.”

The two men left the room and continued on down the hall to the room at the end. They entered the room and looked around. Sirius

sat at the end of the bed and cast a glance at the closet, steadying himself for all he needed to discuss with Harry.

“You can do whatever you like with the room, its completely yours, I want you to feel at home here,” said Sirius, looking around the room.

“Thanks, Sirius.” Harry paused, smiling at his godfather and decided to help the older wizard out. “So, what did you bring me up here to talk about?”

“Erm, right,” said Sirius, realizing just how obvious he had been. “When your dad and I graduated Hogwarts he and your mum were already engaged. Their wedding was planned for the following spring and during the in between time he lived here with me.”

“He did, he lived here? Wow! You never said anything before. Why is that? Why tell me now?” Harry sat down on the bed beside Sirius, terribly excited to learn this piece of information.

Sirius sighed and looked at the closet again. “Well, I have been meaning to tell you. It was hard for me to get the words out. I’m sorry about that Harry.”

Harry shook his head. “I understand, Sirius.”

“Look in the closet,” said Sirius quietly. Harry got up and crossed the room, he took a look back at Sirius who smiled and nodded. “Go on, then.”

Harry opened the closet door and looked at the Quidditch robes which were hanging at the front. “These aren’t mine,” said Harry with a puzzled look.

“I know,” said Sirius. “They were your dads.”

Harry reached out and touched the robes, he fingered the material reverently. He stood in the doorway to the closet for several long minutes, a myriad of emotions overwhelming. Sirius waited patiently knowing this was a significant moment for Harry. The young wizard

turned around to face the man who had willingly taken his father's place. "Thank you."

"They were always yours, Harry. It's just hard for me to let go of James, even now." He smiled sadly, wistful, marveling at just how much like James his son really was.

Needing to break some of the tension, Sirius thought about the conversation Hermione had suggested. He looked at his godson, taking into account that he was a young man and not a child. He was a little surprised Harry hadn't gotten any farther with Ginny when she was apparently willing. He smiled to himself because Harry really was an awful lot like his father. "Do you know to set a Silencing Charm?"

"Uh, yeah. Why?" Harry was taken by surprise at the question.

"Do you know how to cast one on a room?" Sirius thought it was obvious why someone would need to cast a Silencing Charm on a room but apparently Harry didn't.

"Why would I need to do that?" Now Harry was really confused.

"Well, for when Ginny comes over, Harry. This is your home and you're not a child. You and Ginny are young adults." Sirius watched Harry's face as the young wizard began to catch on.

"Before you left," Sirius understood that Harry was talking about the Veil, "I wanted to ask you about girls."

"And now?" asked Sirius.

"I figured some of it out on my own. Hermione helped some too." Sirius smiled at the blush that was rising on Harry's cheeks. "I'm in love with Ginny, when she graduates I'm going to ask her to marry me."

"That's great, Harry! Marriage is wonderful, better than I imagined it would be." Sirius remembered another Potter who was just as sure about who he wanted in his future.

“I just, well, I don’t really want to wait that long to, uh, well, you know.” Harry glanced at Sirius.

“Well, for starters, if that’s something you want in your life you should be able to name it.” Sirius wasn’t as uncomfortable as he thought he would be.

Harry nodded and was thoughtful for a moment. “We get to a certain point and then I pull back because I don’t want to push her.”

“Let her tell you when she wants to stop,” said Sirius. “She knows exactly where her limits are. Just let instinct take over, do what you want and make sure she’s having a good time too.”

“How do I make sure she’s having a good time?” Sirius’ frank, honest manner with no sign of embarrassment encouraged Harry’s to ask questions.

“She’ll let you know what she likes.” Sirius grinned. “There is a place on her, it feels sort of like a button, you pay attention to that and she’ll have a good time.”

“My mates said a girls first time is difficult, is that really true?” Harry just let the questions flow.

“It is,” said Sirius, a fleeting thought of Hermione’s first night went through his mind. “Just be gentle with her that first night. After that, do what feels natural, never hold back on her because that’s not what she needs from you.” Harry nodded not sure what to say to that. Sensing that the conversation was at an end and that he had given Harry some things to think about he got up. “Anytime you need to talk, I’m here, ok?” Harry nodded again. Sirius got up and crossed the room, closing the door quietly behind him.

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Hermione glanced at the grandfather clock as she paced in front of the fireplace, back and forth, back and forth. Sirius stood up and

forced her to sit on the couch with him. "You're making me dizzy." Harry snorted earning a glare from Hermione.

“The vote is tonight, Sirius and I don’t know if I’ve got enough members on my side!” she said desperately.

“You underestimate your persuasiveness, Hermione,” said Harry with an affectionate smile. He couldn’t help enjoying the feeling of being a part of a family that was pulling together for one its members.

The grandfather clock began its slow donging, announcing the top of the hour. "It's time to go, sweet. It'll all be alright, you'll see."

She gave them a last panicked look before tossing some powder into fireplace and stepping into to be swept away in a whirl of green flames.

[illegible]

A/N: Thank you for the reviews!

In POA both Sirius and Remus were prepared to murder Peter Pettigrew. Sirius hunted Peter which is premeditated as opposed to an in the moment crime of passion. He also sent Snape to witness Lupin's transformation knowing that it might result in Snape's death. It is well within Sirius' moral code to kill if he can justify a reason for it. In GF he mentioned with some amount of admiration that Moody never killed if he could help. What is implied but not said is that there are times when you can't help it and a choice must be made.

An unmolested Draco Malfoy is a lot of talk with no intention to do any actual harm of his own hand. In this story he is not unmolested. He has been expelled from Hogwart's, his father is in Azkaban (which I realize I haven't stated anywhere but left it at implied since there has been no mention of him at large), his mother has lost much of her social standing and it all seems to center around Hermione. He is not going to examine his own actions as playing a role in his current predicament. He will instead look for a scapegoat and then he will

dwell on it. He just happened across Hermione and in an act of rage fueled by his frustration he took action.

I have left a few clues, very subtle, here and there that has been building towards the conversation Sirius had with Harry in this chapter. Those clues were the building blocks for the conversation Sirius and Hermione had about Harry and Ginny in the last chapter. Sirius is part father figure part older brother to Harry. In OOTP Harry regrets not asking Sirius about girls. I really wanted to give him that opportunity and explore what that conversation might have been like.

Incidentally, I mention canon not because I'm keeping those events and timelines accurate in this story. I mention it only to explain my reasoning for writing these characters the way that I do.

PLEASE REVIEW!

Abolish

[illegible]

Sorry if this chapter seems to jump around, there are quite a few things in play this month and in order to properly tell the story I have to address the issue with more than one of the organizations involved.

[illegible]

Hermione stood on the sidewalk and looked up at the dilapidated five story building that the ministry had given to F.L.E.M. at Sirius' request. Andromeda stood by her side and by the look on her face she shared Hermione's opinion of the building. They were joined by the seven other members on F.L.E.M.'s committee who had all come to see their new headquarters. Andromeda and Hermione shared a look that clearly said, 'beggars can't be choosers.' Hermione looked around at the lonely, deserted street, assuring herself that no muggles were watching. She withdrew her wand from her robes and flicked it at the door, opening it.

The building opened with a large waiting room that housed an enormous desk that would need a receptionist to sit behind it. The nine witches were heard to murmur, 'Lumos,' as each used their wand as a flashlight. The room was lined with chairs and a few coffee tables that still had old muggle magazines on it. The women cast their eyes about the dark, dusty room and wrinkled their noses in distaste. Hermione looked between the two doors in the room. One was at the left hand side of the room and most likely led to stairs. The other door was at the back of the room and just to the right of the reception desk, leading to the rest of the floor. She walked to the door at the back of the room while Andromeda investigated the door on the left.

“Stairs,” commented Andromeda to Hermione who nodded. She walked over to Hermione to join her in exploring the building.

Hermione was paused by one of her committee members. "I'm going to get started on this room," said Primrose Jorkins, sister-in-law to Bertha Jorkins who was murdered by Voldemort.

"I'll help," offered Lysandra Fortescue, whose husband was also believed to have been murdered by Voldemort. He had disappeared before the last battle never to be seen again.

"Thank you, that will be a big help," said Hermione. "This whole building is going to take a lot of work."

"Good thing this charity has such deep pockets," commented Elladora Bode, wife of Broderick Bode who was murdered on Voldemort's orders. She followed after Hermione who had stepped through the door which led to the rest of the building.

Lysandra and Primrose stayed behind while the rest of the ladies followed Hermione. The door opened into a long hallway that was lined with four medium sized offices, two on each side. They peered into each one finding a small desk with a chair in each one. The offices were just as dusty as the reception area had been. They passed a lengthy room with a large window that contained a long table and about ten chairs. It looked to be a conference room which pleased Hermione. She entered and cast her eyes about, taking in the dusty interior of the room.

"I'll get to work on this room," volunteered Hillary Abbot, aunt to Hannah Abbott, the girl Ron was dating, whose mother, Hillary's sister-in-law, was murdered by Voldemort.

"Thank you, Hillary," said Hermione as she left the conference room to explore the other side of the hallway.

Hermione entered what appeared to be a small employee break room that was lined with cabinets and counter space upon which sat an old, forgotten coffee maker. A water fountain stood in one corner and in the center of the room was a small table surrounded by five chairs. Next to the break room were two bathrooms, one for women the other for men.

“I know a few plumbing spells,” said Jane Bones, sister-in-law to Susan Bones who was murdered by Voldemort. “I’ll see what I can do.”

“Thank you, Jane,” replied Hermione. She continued to the end of the hallway which opened into another hallway which was lined with five more offices.

The center office was enormous, the back of which was lined with windows and contained a huge desk and a large bookshelf. Hermione walked to the back of the office and peered out the window which offered a view of a rather busy street that contained more office buildings. She looked around the room, thinking she would take this office as hers. She exited to explore the offices to the left and the right. All four were roughly the same size as the four offices which lined the other hallway, maybe just a tick larger and also contained a single desk and chair. At the end of the hallway was what appeared to be a supply room.

“I’ll get busy on that first set,” said Elladora Bode, who smiled at Hermione and turned on her heel.

“I’ll join you,” said Arrakis Bagman, wife of the former quidditch star Ludo Bagman. Hermione had to suppress a giggle every time she considered about what Sirius thought of the name Arrakis.

“I’ll get these two,” said Ursula Ollivander, wife of the wandmaker who sat to the right of Hermione in the Daughter’s chamber, indicating the two offices to the left of the office that Hermione considered hers.

Andromeda pointed to the two offices to the right of Hermione’s office. “I’ll get these two.”

Hermione nodded and reentered her office, took another look around and began cleaning it. She first conjured a few candles to hang in the air, thinking she would need to get a few oil lamps for the large room. Then she stretched her arm out and began sucking dust particles into

her wand. Once she cleared the dust away she noted that the office was still pretty dingy. She cast a few cleaning spells on the walls revealing the white paint underneath all the grime. She cleaned the desk, the chair and the bookshelf and then looked around, thinking it would be satisfactory.

She started to think about how the charity would be organized and remembered that there were still four floors they hadn't explored. The other witches gathered in her office, their self appointed tasks all finished. Hermione did another walk through noting that the building wasn't hopeless, that maybe all it needed were inhabitants to care about how it was maintained.

"Let's all go to the conference room and talk about what we would like to accomplish," said Hermione. She exited her office and walked back down the hallway that led to the conference room, followed by her fellow committee members.

Hermione sat at the head of the table and waited for the other witches to find their seats. Once they were settled she began to speak. "I'm still reeling from last month's victory but clearly I'm going to have to get over it because we have a lot of work to do." The committee members all beamed at the young witch who had such incredible drive and determination. "We talked a little about how we want to organize ourselves last month and outlined what our main goals will be. I think we are going to need three subcommittees, one to serve as a political lobby, another to work as a watchdog group and a third to help muggleborns in our community who have been discriminated against. So, who wants to head a subcommittee?" The eight witches looked around at each other for a moment, a quiet murmur filling the room as they talked amongst themselves. The first to speak up was Lysandra Fortescue.

"For years I ran a business with my husband," she began. It was still difficult for her to talk about his disappearance. "I'm familiar with a lot of the laws that govern businesses in our community and have a pretty good idea what can and cannot be gotten away with. For instance, it is perfectly legal for a proprietor to refuse to serve a muggleborn."

“So you think you would like to head up the watchdog subcommittee?” asked Hermione, looking around the room for reaction from the other committee members.

“I think so, yes,” she replied.

“Any thoughts from the committee on this?” Hermione opened it up for discussion.

“I think Lysandra is perfect for the job,” said Ursula. “I too ran a business with my husband before the war. We will be reopening within the year and so I will need to keep abreast of those sorts of things already. It’s easier to keep an eye on what’s going on along Diagon Alley when you’re actually there.”

“Any objections?” queried Hermione. The six remaining witches nodded their heads in agreement, commenting that it was perfect match. “Alright, that’s settled then.” Hermione conjured parchment, a quill and a pot of ink and began to make notes.

“I’ve served on the Wizengamut for the last nine years,” said Elladora. “I’d like to head up the political lobby sub committee.” Hermione smiled at the confident witch and looked around the table for comments. She had considered this a task she might give to herself but Elladora’s connection to the Wizengamut made her a perfect fit.

“Would you have to relinquish your seat?” asked Hermione.

“Oh, no,” replied Elladora. “You see a lot of that on the Wizengamut, that sort of conflict of interest is commonplace.” Hermione raised her eyebrows in surprise.

“My part time position at the ministry grants me access to the law library,” said Primrose. “I’d like to serve on her sub committee.” A murmur of agreement went up around the table.

“Good, I like that,” said Hermione. “The first thing I want you two to work on is to draft a piece of anti discrimination legislation that I can forward to L.M.O.M. and also research how to abolish law that is already on the books. I told you all last month about my attack on Diagon Alley at the hand of a pureblood. He got away with it because of a very old law that was never removed.” Elladora conjured her own parchment, quill and ink and took notes on Hermione’s instructions. “I’ll need that draft just as soon as possible, by the next Daughter’s meeting would be really great.”

“That leaves just one sub committee,” said Hermione. “Who would like to deal with the public and handle complaints from muggleborns who have been discriminated against or even injured.”

“I’ve served on the Society for Distressed Witches committee for twenty years,” said Andromeda. “That is much of what I did, taking complaints and helping witches resolve their problems. I’d like to head that sub committee.”

“I agree,” said Arrakis. “No one here has more experience than Andromeda. I served on that committee with her for the last five years and would like to serve under her.”

“I think that’s a perfect it,” said Hillary. “Don’t you all agree?” Another murmur of assent went up.

“I think,” started Hermione, “that each sub committee should take a floor and hire who they need. Our work of course is volunteer but we’re going to need part time volunteers from the community and full time employees to really run this charity.”

“That means you are going to need a human resources department,” said Hilary. “Both Jane and I have experience from when we worked at the ministry. I’d like to head that department, or sub committee, what have you.”

“I agree,” said Jane. “You are going to need some way to manage hiring, firing, employee complaints, etc. There are lots of laws

governing employment and you'll need experience dealing with all of that."

"This is all volunteer," reminded Hermione. "We can always hire people to handle human resources."

"True," said Jane. "But we have the experience and are willing to do it. It would save the charity the money it would take to hire management and we wouldn't need to do it full time. We would delegate most of it to our employees who bring home less galleons."

"So that just leaves me with public relations, membership drives and fund raisers," said Hermione, thinking that didn't sound so bad at all.

"You are the public face of F.L.E.M.," said Andromeda. "It only makes sense."

"We should all have a hand in that," said Jane. "You can't do it all by yourself. It's something we should all take part in, although I agree you should head that up."

"I guess that's really true," said Hermione thoughtfully. "So, who gets what floor?"

"I think the first floor should be for the complaint office so that muggleborns could just come right off the street and talk to the receptionist," said Arrakis.

"Arrakis is right," said Andromeda. "We should be able to get to them quickly instead of shuffling them to a different floor."

"Anyone disagree?" asked Hermione. A quick discussion proved unanimous agreement.

"You should take the top floor," said Lysandra. "You're the Chairwitch, it only makes sense that you be up there."

Hermione realized she hadn't considered that, she had automatically assumed she should be on the first floor. She was at the head of the organization whether she was Chairwitch or not. "Well, I'd like to get a look at it first but it sounds like a good idea."

"We need to get public support behind the abolishment of that horrid law," said Primrose, going back to the public relations discussion. "We need to plan out an aggressive campaign."

"I agree," said Andromeda. "The more pressure the Wizengamut feels, the more likely they are to go along with our wishes."

"You should involve your husband in this as well, Hermione," said Hillary. "You too Elladora, the more voices we have against the law, from within and without the Wizengamut, the better."

"Wow," said Hermione. "Look at us go." She beamed with pride at the committee which worked so well together.

"Time to explore those other floors," said Ursula. The other witches excitedly agreed.

"Alright then," said Hermione. "Meeting adjourned."

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On her way home from the F.L.E.M. committee meeting Hermione stopped off at Diagon Alley to pick up the ingredients for a calming draught. She thought it might come in handy given her anxiety level over her committee work and her approaching NEWTs. It was only next week that she would sit for her exams and she was exhausted. She got at most four hours of sleep at night but had managed to hide it from Sirius. They would lie down together at night but she would set her alarm for three in the morning and then crawl back into bed before he awoke. Sirius had no idea how hard she was pushing herself.

Everyone commented on how tired she looked and encouraged her to take it easy. Sirius had taken to forcing her to relax by giving her

foot massages. While he was rubbing her feet she would close her eyes and float away on his deep, melodic voice. More than once she had passed out and been carried to bed. He didn't really give a damn if she got an 'E' instead of an 'O' and just humored her whenever she would go on about her potential marks.

The reason she wanted the calming draught was because she had started to get little spasms along her midsection which she attributed to nerves. She had found the draught in one of her text books while brewing a potion in the kitchen. She knew Sirius was used to her brewing in preparation for her Potions NEWT and would never question what this particular potion was for. If she mentioned the spasm to anyone they would rush her to St. Mungo's only to discover it was just nerves and frankly she just didn't have time for that. She reasoned that there would be plenty of time to relax once school was over.

Hermione reached for the door to the apothecary just as it was being opened by another patron. Hermione looked up into face of Lyra Edgecomb who had been smiling her beautiful smile until she saw Hermione. The upward curve of her lips disappeared into a thin line and her brow furrowed angrily. Lyra gave Hermione a cold once over and spun away, her magenta robes whipping around her six inch heels.

Hermione watched her walk away and couldn't help but feel that underneath the make up, the perfect hair and the alluring wardrobe was a rather insecure witch. Sirius had dated Lyra for over six months although how exclusively had never been discussed with her. The rumors at the time were that he had developed deeper feelings for her but that was all to be found in the gossip columns. They had stopped dating a few months before the marriage law was enacted so she knew their breakup didn't have anything to do with her.

She had been putting off asking him whether or not he had any more obsessive ex girlfriends lingering out there. He had spent a long time being considered both quite a catch and more than a bit of a rogue. It stood to reason there might be a whole bevy of Lyra's out there just waiting to sink their claws into her. She shook her head and entered the apothecary resolved to ask him about it when she returned home.

Hermione selected her ingredients and paid for them and then went to one of the public transportation fireplaces and floo'd home. The smell of something cooking greeted her senses making her smile at his thoughtfulness. She took her ingredients to the kitchen and then went in search of Sirius. She found him outside tinkering with his motorbike, wearing tight jeans and no shirt. Her breath caught looking at his firm toned chest and the way his jeans hugged his perfect arse. He flashed a sexy smile when he saw her and got up to give her a hug. He pulled her into his arms and planted a soft kiss on her mouth.

"How did it go?" he asked, before settling himself back in front of his bike, acutely aware that she was practically drooling.

It took her a minute to realize he had asked her a question. She tore her eyes away from him and focused her gaze on the bike. "Great! We go into the building and organized ourselves. I'm really excited about all we're going to accomplish." She leaned her back against the house, taking some of the pressure off of her back. "Then I stopped by Diagon Alley..." Sirius interrupted her.

"What! Hermione, I don't want you going there by yourself!" He looked genuinely alarmed.

"It was a quick stop to the apothecary, Sirius, that's all." She felt a little guilty for not considering how he might react to her shopping trip.

"I don't care, Hermione. I don't want you going off by yourself." He loved her independent streak but he wanted her to take sensible precautions as well.

She put her hands up in surrender. "I'm sorry, Sirius. It won't happen again." She paused. "Guess who I saw."

He paused and looked up at her. "Who?"

"Lyra Edgecombe." She watched him for a reaction.

“Oh,” he said casually, wondering where she might go with this. “How did she react to seeing you?”

“Same,” she replied. “It did make me wonder something, though.”

“Hmm, what’s that?” he asked. He felt he knew where this conversation was going and started to pack up his tools.

“Well...do you think there might be another ‘Lyra’?” She pushed off the wall and followed him into the house.

“Erm, well...” He set his tool kit down and walked into the kitchen. “I, uh, dated a number of women before we we’re married.” He opened the oven and checked on the casserole he made. Before he left the kitchen he picked up a small box she hadn’t noticed earlier.

“I know,” said Hermione. “This isn’t a jealousy thing. Every time I see her it’s tense and I was just wondering if I could expect this from anyone else.” She followed him into the living room.

Sirius sat down and patted the seat next to him. “Before we chat about that I wanted to tell you how proud I am of all the work you’re doing. I got a little something for you.”

She sat next to him and grinned at the box. “What did you do?” she said, clearly pleased.

“Open it and find out,” he replied.

Her fingers fumbled with the box, nervous and excited. She finally got it open and let out surprised sigh. “You didn’t!”

“Yes I did,” he said, pleased with himself.

She picked the ruby ring out of the box and put it on her right ring finger. She held it out so she could admire it. “How did you know?” She snuggled close against him.

“Well, you couldn’t take your eyes off of it.” He nuzzled her neck affectionately.

“Thank you so much. You spoil me, do you know that?” She kissed his neck, wishing her belly wasn’t keeping her from crawling into his lap.

“Hey, what was that look for?” he asked gently.

“I’m just so big, I used to be able to crawl right into your lap,” she said with a pout.

He shifted his body so he could reach around her and leaned in for a kiss. His hands caressed her arm and then ghosted over her breasts. “Better?”

“Much, thank you.” She smiled gratefully at him.

“I’m not complaining,” he said, letting his hand rest on her belly. “You know how sexy I find you, just thinking about you pregnant with my children...” He growled softly and nipped at her neck. “Besides, these,” he caressed her breasts, “have never been more inviting.”

“They are impressive, aren’t they,” she said with a giggle.

An alarm was heard from the kitchen. Sirius got up to check on dinner. “Hungry?”

“Lately, always.”

Sirius chuckled as he took the casserole out of the oven. He dished out two plates of food and brought them to the dining room where she joined him. He set her plate down and took the seat beside her. “You really don’t have anything to worry about, from women I dated I mean, Lyra was sort of unique.”

“Unique how?” She took a bite of the casserole he made. She made a little noise of enjoyment.

He glanced at her and grinned, he thought it was adorable, the marked increase in her appetite. "Well...do you remember when you accused me of being a playboy?"

Hermione blushed. "I was only repeating what Mrs. Weasley said."

"Well, I never got very serious about any one woman." He took a bite of casserole.

"So did you get serious about her?" Hermione shoveled more food into her mouth.

Sirius suppressed a laugh and shook his head. "No, but she didn't take the hint."

"Oh, so what did you do?" Hermione got up and went to the kitchen for a glass of milk. "Are you thirsty?"

"How about a beer, baby." He waited until she returned to answer her first question. "I didn't do anything. She was so persistent; it seemed like more trouble to be firm with her."

"Persistent?" She took a sip of her milk.

"Yeah, wherever I went she seemed to turn up. Remus called her my stalker." He took a last bite of his casserole.

"I couldn't believe she just took Cliodna's obvious abuse that day." Hermione took their plates into the kitchen.

"Actually, that doesn't really surprise me. She's sort of desperate for acceptance. I thought she was really confident when I first met her but the longer I knew her the more I realized she was really quite insecure." He left the dining room for the family room. "How are your feet today?"

"Swollen," she replied. "I got that impression from her too."

“Come here and let me rub them.” He sat on the couch and waited for her to join him.

Hermione would’ve skipped into the family room but she was far too big for that. “Just don’t let me fall asleep.”

“I’m not going to stop you from falling asleep because your body needs rest.” He gave her a challenging look, daring her contradict him.

Hermione huffed but she sat down and stretched out, giving her feet to him all the same. His smug look irritated her so she closed her eyes and let his talented hands sooth her feet. “You are so good at that.”

“That’s because you’re so beautiful.” He chuckled at the face she made.

“That doesn’t even make sense, Sirius.” She was pleased by his comment all the same.

“It doesn’t have to make sense.” He deliberately lowered his voice knowing it had an hypnotic effect on her.

His hands kneaded and rubbed, soothing away the tight, swollen feeling. He talked so she didn’t have to, using his voice against her. He watched her eyes fluttering open occasionally, fighting the sleep her exhausted body so desperately needed. He knew her mind was trying to go over all the things she needed to study when her foot rub was over. He also knew she would never willingly give up the pleasure of having her feet rubbed. His job was to wait her out. It didn’t take long, it never did. He recognized the deep breathing and tiny wheeze that indicated she was out. He rubbed her feet a little longer for good measure and then carried her to bed.

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Sirius sat in the chambers of the Wizengamut, suppressing a yawn, wishing he were anywhere but there. He knew that today was important because Kingsley was going to call on him to talk about

Hermione's attack. Elladora Bode was going to say something about it as well and then the endless discussions would begin as to whether or not the law should be changed or abolished. He knew what he was doing here was important but he hated every minute of it.

He knew Hermione was having trials of her own today. She was at Hogwarts sitting for her NEWTs. When he had left her that morning she had dark circles under her eyes from a lack of sleep. She was also a nervous wreck, completely stressed out and fretting about material she wasn't sure if she had covered.

"And now I'm going to give the floor to one of our junior members, Sirius Black." Kingsley met Sirius' gaze and gave him a little nod.

Sirius cleared his throat and stood to his feet. "My wife was attacked two months ago while shopping along Diagon Alley." A muscle jumped in Sirius' jaw. "She was three months pregnant at the time and could have miscarried as a result of the attack." He hadn't realized he would have such a strong emotional reaction to recounting the events. He took a deep breath to continue. "She was slammed against the wall, pushed to the ground and then kicked." A sound of collective shock went around the underground chamber. "This violent action on the part of Draco Malfoy was not a crime. Auror Dawlish had no choice but to release him because of an archaic law which states that if a pureblood attacks a muggleborn with non magical means it is not a crime." There was dead silence. "I move to open a discussion on abolishing this law." Sirius sat back down and waited to see what would happen next.

Elladora Bode stood up and seconded Sirius' motion after which, just as he predicted, began the endless discussion on a subject that was to him, obvious. A page entered the chambers and brought Sirius a note. He read it and without saying a single word in explanation he stood up and rushed out the chamber.

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Hermione set her quill down and breathed a huge sigh of relief. She had just finished her last exam, Muggle Studies, for which there was no practical. Hermione walked to front of the Great Hall, handed in

her paper and promptly fainted. She was immediately taken to the infirmary where she was revived.

“How much rest have you been getting, Mrs. Black?” Madam Pomfrey was stern and eyeing Hermione imperiously.

“Not nearly enough,” said a deep voice from the doorway. Sirius walked over and parted the curtain, looking cross and concerned. Hermione groaned in the back of her throat.

“You’re pregnant, Mrs. Black, you need to slow down. How far along are you?” Pomfrey began to examine Hermione thoroughly while Sirius watched on. Hermione looked anywhere but into his eyes.

“About five months,” replied Hermione.

“Just over halfway done, then. I am prescribing a week of bed rest...” Hermione interrupted with a small noise of protest.

“That’s easy enough to arrange,” said Sirius, staring straight at Hermione.

“I can’t stay in my bed for a week!” she cried, dismayed.

“You can and will,” said Sirius firmly, allowing no room for discussion. “I’ll send a note to the Chief Warlock to let him know I’ll be out for the next several days.”

“After that you have got to slow down, Mrs. Black.” Madam Pomfrey left Hermione alone to deal with her husband.

Sirius conjured a chair to sit on and settled next to her, picking her hand up in his and kissing it. “It’s about more than just you, sweet. It’s about those babies as well. I’ve been telling you for months that you need to slow down and it turns out I was exactly right.” Hermione sighed and nodded her head. “It’ll be over before you know it and then you can go back to taking on the world.” He gave a cheeky grin, letting her know he was teasing her a little. “Deal?”

“Deal,” she replied, wearily.

“Harry is moving in today with the help of Ron and Ginny, I believe,” said Sirius, giving them a change in topic.

“That’s right,” she replied, sounding tired.

Madam Pomfrey walked back into Hermione’s curtained off room. “Alright, Mrs. Black, I’m discharging you. You be sure to go home and get some rest.”

“Don’t worry, Poppy, she will,” assured Sirius.

True to his word, Sirius got her home and put her to bed. She took a long nap, emerging from her bedroom several hours later. In her family room were Harry, Ron and Ginny along with Sirius and Mrs. Weasley. She was greeted warmly as she made her way into the room and sat down beside Sirius.

“How are you feeling?” asked Harry.

“Much better,” answered Hermione.

Sirius leaned over and kissed her temple. “Good.”

“Are you all moved in?” Hermione leaned into Sirius, resting her head against his chest.

“Yeah, the only thing we have to go back for is graduation.” Ron gave Hermione a concerned, scrutinizing look.

“I thought you were going back to see Hannah,” said Ginny.

“I am, I just meant classes were over,” replied Ron.

“Well, I have to get dinner started,” said Mrs. Weasley, getting up. “Ron, Ginny, don’t over stay your welcome. Hermione, take care of

yourself.” She paused to look at Hermione critically. “Sirius, make her take it easy.”

“Got it covered,” replied Sirius. “Thanks, Molly.” He gave Hermione a significant look as Molly returned home by way of the Floo Network. She just rolled her eyes, already resigned to whatever he had in mind for her.

“Hannah’s waiting for me,” said Ron. He got up and gave Hermione a hug before leaving. “Take better care of yourself.” He returned to Hogwarts through the fireplace.

“All my stuff is in my room but none of it is arranged. Ginny do you want to help me?” Harry was trying his best at casual.

Ginny giggled and glanced shyly at both Sirius and Hermione. “Sure, Harry.”

Sirius shook his head sadly once their backs were turned. Hermione pushed against him playfully. "Be nice," she admonished.

"Alright, alright." Sirius patted her leg. "Are you hungry?"

“Starved.”

Sirius got up and went to the kitchen to make dinner for everyone.

[illegible]

A/N: Thank you so much for the reviews

I had a lot of chapters planned but then as I go into writing them I started to worry that the story was going to drag. So, I had to combine the events over several chapters and the way it looks now the fic will end in the next few chapters or so (4-7ish) and this time I really and truly will be done. I'm interested in doing a few long one shots and maybe take another look at The Sacrifice although right now that's not looking too hopeful. When I read Sacrifice now I just don't buy it

and that's a problem for me. We'll see. Please, please, no one hold your breath for Sacrifice, right now I'm not sure if I'll ever repost it.

After this chapter I am going to reread the fic and see where my loose ends are. I think I know what I have to tie up but I would hate to leave something out there hanging. The next chapter will probably take me over a week to finish, be patient with me. If you feel that I have left something unaddressed that I need to wrap up please let me know.

Head of the Lion

NC17

Hermione turned in the bed, trying to find Sirius' warm body, finding instead the small, furry form of Crookshanks. Disappointed, she ran her hand over his orange fur, slowly rousing out of a deep sleep. She was pulled into full wakefulness by the soft puffing sound of hard breaths being taken. She sat up in bed and saw Sirius on the floor doing his morning sit ups. She watched, fascinated as the muscles in his neck, chest and arms strained and bulged as he pressed forward, leaned back and again.

Even in the low lit bedroom she could see the sweat glisten off his hard, strong body. With each glorious flex of his hard abdominal muscles she could feel herself getting wetter. Feeling eyes caressing his body, Sirius looked over to see his young wife gazing lustfully at him. A grin and a wink and then Hermione could no longer resist. Naked, she crawled out of the bed and over to Sirius with a rapacious grin and a mind full of smut.

With him as her willing accomplice she pulled off his boxers, revealing him to her pleasure. She reached out a hand and took hold of her prize, licking her lips in anticipation. Sirius took in a sharp gasp, surprised and pleased by his randy wife. He had come to have a deep appreciation for her second trimester. She had always been a willing partner in his homespun debauchery but her needs of late surpassed his own. He was only too willing to go along with her devious plans.

She slowly stroked his cock to full attention, a symphony of elated moans and groans accompanied her ministrations. She delighted in the feel of him in her hand, baby skin soft and rock hard at the same time. She settled between his legs, pushed closer to him and pressed her belly against his balls.

“Hermione,” he panted, pleased and agonized.

The hairs from his legs and scrotum tickled as she pumped her husband, helpless to stop her and unwilling to try. One hand moved

up and down, her thumb caressing the head with each pass, over and over again, the other hand explored his taut, toned torso. Her short nails scratched gently down his chest, reaching up again to pinch his nipple. Sirius jumped and stifled a moan and then begged her for more.

“Faster, baby,” he pleaded, almost pained.

Hermione pressed closer, excited by what she knew was just ahead. She spit down onto her hand and pumped faster, glancing between Sirius’ open expression and the thick meat in her active hand. Sirius’ breaths came faster and faster, calling out her name with urgency.

“Don’t stop, honey, please.”

“Come for me, Sirius,” she commanded gently, seductively.

“Yes, Hermione...oh, god...” Sirius found his release as his passion poured out of him.

Sirius let his head drop to his chest as he recovered his breathing and heart rate. Hermione smiled at him and got up to retrieve her wand. She vanished the mess she had just made as Sirius got unsteadily to his feet. Reaching her, he grabbed her by the hips and pulled her toward him. “Have I mentioned lately just how much I love your pregnancy.” His hands left her hips, gently caressed the swell at her middle and finally made it to her breasts, lightly fingering her nipples. Moaning low in her throat, Hermione tossed her head back and onto his shoulder, kissing his neck. “What do you need, Hermione?” She felt the rumble of his voice through her back.

“I’m so horny,” she admitted miserably. “All the time it seems.”

“Well, we’ll just have to do something about that,” he purred. His deep, smooth voice excited her more, she practically whined, thinking about the satisfaction he was about to deliver. “Lay on the bed for me.”

Hermione turned around in his arms and took a step back, taking hold of his hands as she did. She walked backward, leading him until the back of her legs made contact with the bed. Laying back, she turned her head to the side so she could watch him. He kneeled on the floor before her and pulled her closer, gently spreading her thighs apart with his hands. Using his fingers he tenderly spread her lips and then pressed his face into her pussy. His hot tongue danced around her clit, lightly teasing. Hermione called out to him softly, her fingers lightly stroking his hair. He glanced up to check for her reaction but his eyes were met with her burgeoning belly. Chuckling at himself he went to work with the teasing strokes he knew would have her begging for more.

“Sirius, please...”

He chuckled quietly to himself.

Right on cue, Hermione.

He increased his tongue's tempo, swirling and twirling around her little bundle of nerves, the key to her pleasure. Gently he inserted a single finger and massaged her gently, still teasing, coaxing. Hermione's sighing moan encouraged him to insert another finger and swirl his tongue a little faster.

“Yes, oh...yes...Sirius...don't...don't stop...oh...”

Sirius inserted yet a third finger and began to pump without mercy. He took her clit gently into his mouth and suckled her. He could feel her silken sheath quiver around his fingers and knew it wouldn't be long now.

Hermione could feel it approaching, getting closer and closer. The tension in her body was screaming for release. Her whole body gave a little shiver and then the first blistering waves of ecstasy began to flow out from her core. The waves increased in intensity and his name was ripped from her mouth.

“Sirius!”

The pleasure began to subside and in its wake was a pleasant warm feeling that enveloped her and held her close. He slipped his fingers out of her as she reached for him to cuddle her. He joined her on the bed, pulling her back up against his chest, laying soft kisses along her neck and shoulder.

“Thank you,” she whispered, still breathless.

“My pleasure, oh, and thank you, too.”

A contented ‘hmmm’ was all she could manage to get out.

After several long languid moments Sirius gave her hips a little squeeze and sat up.

“Where do you think you’re going?” Hermione gave him a sly grin indicating she was up for more.

Sirius sighed. There was nothing more that he would like to do than make love to his wife all day. “I’ve got to go to work.” His opinion on the matter was clear in his tone.

“Oh,” she said, a little dejected.

“Aren’t you and Harry finishing up the nursery today, anyway?” Sirius paused in the bathroom door way before heading off to shower.

“Yeah.” There wasn’t much enthusiasm in her voice. With school over and her charity running like a well oiled machine there wasn’t much activity for Hermione. With nothing to do but grow babies and rest as much as possible, her life had taken a detour into boring. It didn’t help that every time she looked in the mirror she was fatter than ever.

In the beginning she thought there would be nothing better than to be a stay at home mom, raise her children as they ought to be. All her recent free time however was causing her to reconsider that option.

She knew that the law which allowed Draco Malfoy to physically abuse her and get away with it was being hotly contested. Sirius never complained but she suspected that were it not for this particular issue, he would be playing a lot of hooky from his job. There was a point in time when she believed the Daughter's and F.L.E.M would take up every second of her day. In truth, for awhile, it had. The hard part however was over. To make matters worse her committee had banned her from overexerting herself until the babies were born. She came to learn that overexerting meant lifting a single finger to so much as sign an official document.

Sirius stepped out of the bathroom, dry but nude and grinned at the unguarded look of lust on his wife's face. He waited until she realized he was watching her ogle his hard, lean form and then winked at her. Hermione blushed scarlet, shook her head and left the bedroom, mumbling something about making breakfast.

"Ah, love?" said Sirius, holding back laughter as well as he could.

"What?" she snapped, still embarrassed at having been caught.

"Well, and its totally up to you, but don't you think you should put some clothes on first?" Sirius got his laughter under control, opting instead for an incredulous chuckle.

Hermione's face fell. Ever since her second trimester she didn't think things through clearly enough. The hormones coursing through her body seemed to rob her of her good senses. A miserable sob of frustration escaped her lips and instantly Sirius was at her side, his arms holding her close.

"Now, now...you know what's going on. I wasn't making fun of you. I was just picturing Harry's shock when he found you in the kitchen cooking commando." He kissed her temple softly, relieved when he felt her laugh along with him.

"I guess that would scar him for life," she chuckled.

“Hardly,” he countered. “I’ve told you before, every time I look at your beautiful, swollen belly...” He trailed off letting his eyes make his point for him. They raked hotly over her naked form. “It’s nearly enough to keep me home today.” His darkened eyes and husky voice completed the picture of a man on the verge of taking what he wanted. He closed his eyes for a moment and let out a long breath. “Unfortunately, today’s debate is a continuation of yesterday’s debate and it all centers around Malfoy’s bleeding loophole.”

“I was so tired yesterday. You never got a chance to tell me what the opposition is saying.” Hermione slowly pulled her house robe on so that she could go make breakfast.

Sirius’ face darkened over briefly. “It’s actually a clever bit of word play. Their contention is that the Ministry of Magic is just that, a body governing the proper and improper use of magic. The witch or wizard who steps outside of the bounds of what is considered legal use of magic is dealt with accordingly. However the ministry is not supposed to concern itself with the daily comings and goings of otherwise law abiding witches and wizards.”

Hermione’s face went red with rage. “Exactly what was I supposed to do? Contact the muggle police?”

“ Well, that is exactly where their argument breaks down. Unfortunately there is a faction that finds what happened to you reprehensible but is leery of giving the ministry anymore control over individual lives.” Sirius rubbed his temples in anticipation of the coming headache.

“Well,” spluttered Hermione, “that’s just ridiculous.”

“They aren’t all that vocal...yet. I wish there was a way to simply force this issue to a vote before the original issue becomes completely lost.” He walked over to a dresser and pulled out a pair of boxer shorts and put them on.

“Hmmm...Elladora is coming over to discuss the last meeting’s minutes with me. I’ll see if her subcommittee can’t draw something up

that would do just that. Halt discussion and force it to a vote.” Hermione paused and took a quick glance at Sirius. “Speaking of which, I really think attending the last committee meeting could not have possibly fallen into the overexerting category.”

“Hermione...” said Sirius, praying for patience as he pulled his trousers on. “We’ve been over this a million times. You are supposed to rest. I know it seems like a very long time but honestly its really not. Just a few more months and the world is yours to conquer. Really.” He tucked the white button down shirt into his pants.

“Sirius Black, you cannot fathom how bored I am stuck in this house all day!” Hermione’s voice was a near shrieking whine.

“Oh,” he chuckled. “I see. So I have absolutely no way of knowing what it’s like to be cooped up in a house?” Sirius slipped into his stylish, Italian made dragon hide loafers.

Hermione suddenly realized how thoughtless her words were. “I didn’t mean...I mean to say...oh, drat it all, Sirius. I’m sorry.”

“Now, the only things I really want you to steer clear of are anything to do with the Daughter’s or F.L.E.M. You let yourself get all worked up and before you know it you’re fainting from pushing yourself to hard.” He lifted her chin with a finger, ducked his head so he could look at her and smiled. “Now, you are of course free to go shopping if you like. I would greatly prefer if Harry went with you in case you encounter Malfoy or someone of similar intents. Didn’t you say just the other day that you needed to buy a few more things for the babies?” Sirius slipped into his most expensive black robes which he liked to wear when going to work.

“Don’t forget your cologne,” said Hermione absently.

“Oh, right...thanks.” Sirius ducked into the bathroom for a moment.

Hermione wasn’t in any better a mood. She felt like a fat, bloated, caged brood mare. She was looking forward to meeting with Elladora later on that day. She knew Elladora would edit so that Hermione had

no possibility of feeling any stress but it would be something, something to look forward to. She let out a tremendous, self pitying sigh. She opened the door to the bedroom, still dressed in her house robe and shuffled her way into the kitchen. She was too absorbed in her own issues that she didn't smell or see Harry making breakfast. Harry flashed her a winning, friendly smile. She returned with a low grumble that didn't sound remotely sociable.

"What's wrong with you this morning?" After seven years of friendship Harry didn't feel the need to beat around the bush.

Hermione mumbled something that sounded like 'prisoner.'

Harry laughed good naturedly and then set a plate of eggs, bacon and toast in front of her. "Eat first, your mood always improves after you eat." Hermione shot him a death glare.

"Oh, good," said Sirius as he walked into the room. "You're feeding her."

Hermione would have made an angry noise if her mouth hadn't been full of eggs and toast. She opted to glare at them both, wishing they weren't being so damned patronizing and just a little more sympathetic. However much to her further annoyance she felt the bulk of her irritation begin to slide off. She finished her breakfast and pushed her plate back.

"I'm still upset at not being able to participate in my life in any meaningful way. I've worked really hard to get what I've achieved. I understand your concerns but there is one thing you need to understand. I am going to the Daughter's meeting tonight and you will not stand in my way." Hermione stood up, hands on the table, leaning over and looking as menacing as she could muster.

In a flash of intuition Sirius realized that keeping her completely away from those things she had worked for would also cause her stress. "I'm sorry, Hermione. Of course, you're right." He paused to pick his words carefully. "There is a fine line between pushing yourself, the way that is natural for you, the way that is probably good for you,

unless you are say six months pregnant and participating at an observational level to maintain a presence in those activities that are important to you. I hope you understand that it is in my nature to be a bit overprotective where you are concerned.” He gave her an understanding smile.

“Thank you, Sirius.” Just when she thought she had him all figured out, he surprised her.

The grandfather clock in the living room chimed, indicating the top of the hour.

Sirius swore under his breath. “Late again.” He grabbed a piece of toast, kissed his wife’s cheek and headed for the fireplace. He was whisked away in a swirl of green flames.

“So,” said Harry, having just witnessed marital compromise before his very eyes. It was illuminating for him. “What are we to do today?”

“Well, I’ve got some work to do in the nursery. We might go shopping later on, um, oh, Elladora Bode from my F.L.E.M. committee will stop by and then of course, I’ve got the Daughter’s meeting.” Hermione took her plate into the kitchen.

“What time does Madam Bode come over?” Harry finally sat down to his own breakfast.

“Not until three,” replied Hermione.

“Are we shopping in London or Hogsmeade?” asked Harry.

“Hogsmeade, I think,” answered Hermione. “I’ve already been to Diagon Alley a few times.”

“Well, let me eat and shower and I’ll be ready to go.” Harry shoved a piece of toast into his mouth.

“Yeah, I need to shower and dress as well,” said Hermione. “Thirty minutes.”

Harry swallowed what was in his mouth. "That sounds great."

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Harry looked around in wonder. He had no idea that magical toys came in such a wide variety. He wondered if his parents had bought him a lot of toys. He smiled and shook his head. Of course they did. He looked over at Hermione who was lost in infant wear. Baby clothes, toys and of course more books were the last items on a very long list. Whatever problem she may have spending money on herself was completely cured when it came to spending on the twins.

"Look Harry! Isn't this adorable?" She held up a powder blue outfit that made Harry cringe inwardly. The male twin had his complete and total sympathy.

"Brilliant," said Harry, weakly, which went unnoticed by Hermione. She was too enthralled in throwing outfit after outfit into the little cart that followed her around.

"Don't they grow out of their clothes pretty fast?" asked Harry, privately thinking that she could clothe an army of infants.

"Very fast," she replied. "That's why I'm getting a variety of ages. I'm trying to stock up through six months.

"And you don't think you have enough?" Harry looked pointedly at the intimidating mountain of baby clothes.

"Oh, yes...I see what you mean." Hermione paused, thoughtful for a moment, considering putting some of it back. She decided against that course of action. Better to be safe than sorry. "Alright, let's talk toys."

"So, are you two any closer to picking out names?" Harry picked through a variety of toys but nothing was catching his attention.

"We're trying," said Hermione wearily.

“Sirius told me he had suggested Leo, you know, because of his family.” Harry had the tone of someone who was building toward something.

“Right, Leo James Black just didn’t have a ring to it, you know.” Hermione picked up a doll that actually urinated real urine. “Ugh.” She put the wet mess back on the shelf.

“Well,” said Harry carefully. “I had an idea for a name.”

“Oh, yeah?” asked Hermione. “Well, let’s hear it.”

“Well, it’s a star and it’s actually on the constellation Leo.” Harry carefully built his case. He had a good feeling about his name.

“Really? That sounds promising. Sirius will love that.” Hermione stopped in front of an aisle full of crib linens. “Damn! I almost forgot about these.”

“The significance of this star is that it represents the head of the lion.” Harry wasn’t sure if he had her full attention or not. She appeared to be lost in linens.

Hermione came to a full stop. “That’s pretty significant. Tell me the name Harry! Out with it!”

Harry took a deep breath. “Rasalas.”

“Rasalas James Black.” Hermione said the name in full, trying it out. “Harry,” she breathed, meeting his eyes with a wide, pleased smile. “I really, really like it.”

“Rasalas James Black,” said Harry proudly. He knew he had a good feeling about this name. “Do you think Sirius will like it?”

“Actually, I think he’ll love it.” Hermione had a huge smile on her face.

“Wait here,” said Harry. He headed off to a part of the store that had toys for older kids. When he came back he had two toddler sized broomsticks. “You can never start too early!” He was grinning from ear to ear.

Any other day Hermione might have objected but she was fairly certain she had just learned the name of her son and so she was feeling generous. All of a sudden Hermione’s hand flew to her belly, left of center. Without saying a word she grabbed Harry’s hand and placed it against her belly. He wore a puzzled, questioning look at first and then his eyes flew wide.

“He kicked,” whispered Harry.

“Or she,” reminded Hermione. “Sirius has been talking to them every night since they started doing that. He lays his head on my belly and tells them bedtime stories. It’s the most amazing thing because they always quiet right down.” Hermione wasn’t sure if Harry had heard her or not. He now had a hand on either side of her belly and was getting the twins in stereo.

Harry’s eyes slowly rose to meet Hermione’s. His face was awash in wonder and awe. “You’re going to be a mum,” he whispered, as though it had only just occurred to him.

Hermione laughed lightly. “What did you think I was doing all this time Harry?”

“It never seemed real until just now,” he explained.

Hermione smiled and then turned back to the crib sheets, grabbing a few of her favorites and tossing them in. “Well, I think that about covers it for today. What’d you say we head home.”

Harry still appeared to be somewhat dazed and just nodded dumbly.

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Hermione and Harry were in the nursery finding room for all of her purchases. The little dresser was full of clothes the newborns would need while the closet was hung with clothes the twins could grow into. She had covered the crib mattress in her favorite sheets, the ones covered in pink and blue runes. They were trying to organize the mountain of toys when they heard Sirius call from downstairs.

“Up here!” called Hermione.

The sound of large feet tromping up the stairs ended in Sirius standing in the doorway to the nursery. He had a strange look on his face that was equal parts panic and triumph.

“What’s wrong?” whispered Hermione.

“Well, it seems that Malfoy’s success at beating you up and getting away with it is having a ripple effect.” Sirius’ voice was grim.

“What do you mean?” asked Harry darkly.

“Well, since school let out for summer hols there has been a rash of pureblood versus muggleborn violence.” Sirius shifted edgily in the doorway. “The opposition has been trying to keep this under wraps but its out now. This is no longer one isolated incident. There is a pattern.”

“That loathsome, worthless...” Hermione’s face was red with rage. “Oh, how I wish Moody had made the change permanent!”

“I know, sweetheart. Calm down, though. He’s not worth getting too stressed out over.” He stepped close to her and wrapped her up in his arms. “Until we get this sorted I don’t want you leaving home without me. Is that alright?”

“What about the Daughter’s?” she asked, still wrapped securely in his arms.

“Well, naturally you can do that,” he reassured. “So, what have you two been up to this afternoon?”

“We bought enough clothes for ten babies,” said Harry with an impish grin.

“Did not!” said Hermione as she swatted at him. “Oh, oh, oh!” Hermione bounced on the balls of her feet.

Sirius raised an eyebrow at her with a puzzled yet amused look on his face. “Was there something you wanted to tell me?”

Harry chuckled at his best friend who looked like she was about to burst. “Shall I?” he asked her with a laugh in his voice.

She nodded vigorously.

“On the constellation Leo there is a star that represents the head of the lion. The name of that star is...”

“Rasalas,” said Sirius, interrupting Harry. He looked down into his wife’s shining eyes and nodded. “It’s perfect.” He gave her a light squeeze and placed a soft kiss on her cheek. “Rasalas James Black,” he said in a strong, sure voice.

“Now you just have to figure out her name,” said Harry.

Hermione rolled her eyes. “We’re working on it.”

The doorbell rang.

“I’ll get it,” said Sirius cheerfully.

“That will be Elladora,” said Hermione. With a last look at the nursery she turned and left, heading carefully down the stairs.

Elladora Bode greeted Hermione with a huge smile. “Wow! I think you’re bigger than the last time I saw you.”

“Baby,” called Sirius from the entryway.

Hermione gave Elladora a quick smile. "Yes?"

"Harry and I are going to take a ride on the bike." He gave her a happy, satisfied smile.

"I'll probably be gone when you get back. I've got the Daughter's tonight." Hermione knew his smile was all about knowing his son's name. He nodded to let her know he heard her and then turned to the door. Harry waved to her as he followed Sirius out the door. She turned her attention back to Elladora.

Hermione let Elladora fill her in on what F.L.E.M. had been up to. There had been a recent flood of muggleborns who had been physically abused by purebloods only to find out they had no recourse. The watchdog subcommittee had a file on businesses that were known to discriminate against muggleborns. Elladora's committee was one step ahead of Hermione and had drafted a ready to implement piece of legislation that would, if passed, force the debate over 'Malfoy's law' to a vote.

"I am so proud of us," said Hermione, a little emotional. "This is exactly what F.L.E.M. was supposed to be about.

"I spoke with Umbridge today at the ministry," said Elladora. "L.M.O.M. is ready to send our legislation straight through. She almost guaranteed it would be heard the next time the Wizengamut convenes."

"So, all I really need to do is hand it to her tonight?" asked Hermione.

"That's it. Everything else is in place." Elladora gave Hermione a wink.

The grandfather clock chimed, announcing the top of the hour.

"Well, come on. We'd better get going don't you think?" Elladora stood and gave Hermione a hand.

Hermione gave Elladora a huge smile. It was awful, the things that were happening but she knew she had a right to feel good that she had created an organization that would both help the victims and change the laws. She waddled confidently to the fireplace and disappeared in a whirl of green flames.

[illegible]

A/N: Thank you for the wonderful reviews!

It may take me awhile to put out the next chapter. I really, really, really have to find that notebook! Please send me your positive finding things that are lost energy! I'm going to need it!

Miscommunication

Harry and Hermione sat in the living room watching television. It was a recent addition and they were making the most of it. Unlike many wizarding households, Sirius had always taken advantage of that trademark muggle convention known as electricity. In contrast with Hogwarts where the super abundance of magic coming from both the castle's inhabitants and the castle itself which made electronics an impossibility, their home was electricity friendly.

The television had been Harry's idea, a gift for giving him a place to call home. Despite Sirius' protests that Harry was living with them because of his misstep at number twelve, Grimmauld Place, Harry would hear none of it. He claimed a selfish motivation, that of wanting to watch television, but nobody was fooled.

Hermione graciously thanked Harry for the generous gift, knowing only too well that Harry was not to be dissuaded once his mind was set. She was secretly thrilled with the gift because just like Harry she longed for a few muggle things in her otherwise magical life.

While they sat in companionable silence watching a comedy, laughing together in all the right places; their attention was diverted by the sound of scratching at the window. Harry patted Hermione's knee and got up to relieve the owl of its burden. He picked an owl treat from the bowl by the window and then opened it. The owl stopped its fluttering and dutifully stuck its leg out. Harry removed the letter and gave the owl its treat. It hooted thankfully and then flew back the way it came. Harry held the letter reverently in his hands as he walked back over to the couch. Hermione looked up at him and noticed the anxious expression on his face.

"Who is it from?" she asked curiously.

"The Ministry of Magic," he replied, his voice drenched in apprehension.

"You're not in any kind of trouble are you?" she asked as he resumed his seat beside her.

“No,” he replied. “I think...I think it’s from the Academy.” She looked at him expectantly, waiting for him to open the letter but he just sat there, staring at it.

“Would you like me to open it?” she asked sympathetically.

Her words seemed to snap him out of his apparent shock. He smiled shyly at her. “Nah, I got it.” He untied the ribbon around the rolled up piece of parchment and then broke the wax seal. He slowly unfurled it while keeping his eyes closed and his breath held. He let out his breath, opened his eyes and read the contents of the letter. A huge smile spread across his face. “I got in.” His voice was barely a whisper.

Hermione threw her arms around him in congratulations. “I knew it!” she squealed delightedly.

“Do you mind if I pop over to the Burrow and tell Ginny?” asked Harry.

“Of course not! I’ll owl Sirius and let him know the good news.” She paused to think for a moment. “You know Sirius will want to do something to celebrate. Keep your schedule clear; don’t let Molly strong arm you into anything before you talk to us.”

Harry smiled. “Sure thing. Thanks, Hermione.” Harry stepped into the fireplace and was gone in a swirl of green.

Hermione conjured a quill, a pot of ink and some parchment. She penned Sirius a quick note about the good news and let him know Harry was keeping his schedule free. She walked over to Mercury and gently petted his sleek feathers. He stuck his leg out and let his mistress tie on the letter. She gave him an owl treat and asked him to hurry.

Hermione returned to her previous distraction. During a commercial break she let her eyes wander about the family room. They landed on her NEWTs results which still lay out. She lightly fingered the tennis

bracelet at her wrist which had been Sirius' congratulatory gift. As she stared at the results her face began to turn down into a little frown. It bothered her that she had worked so hard for those grades, top of her class in fact, only to find herself stagnant.

With grades like hers she could do anything but it looked like her future would be consumed by motherhood. Sirius always told her that once the babies were born she was free to take over the world, but was she? His little joke always made her smile but the truth was, once the babies were born she still wouldn't be free.

Not that she railed against motherhood, quite the opposite. She couldn't wait to meet her son and daughter but she knew that at some point she was going to need more. Then something struck her; why couldn't she do both? The muggle's had their childcare centers, surely there was the magical equivalent. She wondered what Sirius would think about that. She resolved to talk to him about when he got home. Wondering who might know about things like magical daycares, her thoughts landed on Andromeda. She would know which ones were the best. Just as she started to write she heard a scratching sound at the kitchen window. She looked over to see Mercury waiting patiently to be let in. She walked over and opened the window. Mercury hopped inside and stuck his leg out so she could remove the note. Sirius had written his reply on the backside of her letter to him.

Get a headcount and make reservations at The Sorcerer's Garden.
Invite EVERYONE!

P.S. you are the hottest thing on two legs I have ever seen

Hermione blushed and giggled.

"Everyone?" she said out loud.

She took another piece of parchment and at the very top she wrote 'Guest List' and underlined it twice. Then she started writing down names. There was Ron, of course, well the entire Weasley clan actually. Then there was Remus and Tonks as well. She paused to think, chewing thoughtfully on the end of her quill. It couldn't hurt to

invite Andromeda and Ted. Finally she added Professors Dumbledore and McGonagall.

Looking over her completed list she realized she had a lot of work to do. She decided to go with written invitations for Dumbledore, McGonagall and the Tonkses. In the letters she conveyed the urgency of an immediate response. Once she had sent Mercury on his way she walked over to the fireplace and threw in some powder. She cried out the address of Remus and Tonks and stepped into the flames.

Remus was sat upon their couch in the little sitting room, reading a book. He looked up when he heard the activated fireplace and then smiled in pleased surprise. "Welcome, Hermione! What brings you here?"

"Well," began Hermione, "Harry got his letter of acceptance to the Academy and Sirius wants to celebrate. We'd like to invite you to join us at The Sorcerer's Garden this evening."

"Wow!" said Remus. "He's really going all out, isn't he?" Remus paused for a moment. "I'm not sure if I have anything nice to wear but I'm sure Tonks would love to go."

Hermione shook her head with a devilish glint in her eye. When she spoke it was with slow deliberation. "They have this desert that you will love." She let her voice take on a seductive quality. "It starts out with the moistest chocolate cake that will ever pass through your lips. Hidden in the cake are pieces of the world's finest chocolate truffles." She paused significantly to let him take that in. "Then," she continued in a sultry voice, "they cut a piece of that cake, just for you and pour a layer of ganache on top and let it cool." Hermione let her voice drop to a whisper. "And then they drizzle syrup made of the world's finest chocolate." Hermione raised her voice to normal. "This cake is one of their specialties, you know." She looked up to see Remus, dazed, watching her with his mouth hanging open. Hermione snapped her fingers at Remus, startling him. He looked at her, embarrassed, with a sheepish smile.

He cleared his throat a little. "Naturally, I wouldn't miss it for the world. For Harry, you see." He grinned a bit sheepishly at her.

"Naturally," agreed Hermione. "For Harry." She tossed him a smug grin.

"What time are reservations for?" asked Remus.

"Seven thirty," replied Hermione.

"I imagine you have a few more stops to make." Remus still had a slightly dazed expression on his face.

"I'm headed to the Burrow now," confirmed Hermione, a slight look of dread on her face.

"Good luck," said Remus sympathetically. They both knew that Molly would want to take over the festivities.

"See you tonight," said Hermione. She offered him a last smile before stepping up to the fireplace. She grabbed a handful of floo powder and threw it in. "The Burrow!" she cried confidently and then stepped into the green flames.

The scene she arrived to was one of festive celebration. The only Weasley's at home were Molly, Ron and Ginny but they were making enough joyous noise for the whole lot of them. Upon seeing Hermione step through the fireplace they immediately pulled her into their merriment.

"I got my letter too, Hermione!" chortled Ron happily, his face flush with pleasure.

"That's wonderful, Ron!" sang Hermione, stepping forward to give him a big hug.

"Well," said Molly. "This calls for a celebration! We're going to need a cake and..."

Hermione politely interrupted Molly. "Excuse me, Mrs. Weasley, but Sirius and I already have plans with Harry." Molly's face fell.

"That's true, Mrs. Weasley," said Harry. "They asked me to keep my schedule free tonight."

"Oh," said Molly, a bit more snappish than she intended.

"Everyone is invited of course," said Hermione. "Our treat."

Molly's face brightened. "Oh," she said again, this time much lighter. "What can I do to help?"

"Not a thing," smiled Hermione. "We're taking everyone to The Sorcerer's Garden. The reservation is at seven thirty." Ginny did a little dance of joy behind her mother's back.

Molly spluttered in surprise. "That's far too expensive!"

Hermione remained calm. She had expected this. "We've already got confirmed guests, Molly, and Harry promised to keep his schedule free for us."

"Now let's just talk about this," said Molly diplomatically, hoping to use her parental authority as a means of coercion. "We can have just as fine a celebration right here."

"I'm sure you're right, Mrs. Weasley," replied Hermione. "But Sirius really wants to do something extra special for Harry. He's had so few opportunities over the years, let's let him have this."

"Oh, well..." said Molly a bit self consciously. "I guess we can celebrate with Harry another day."

"Don't be silly," said Hermione surprised. It suddenly dawned on her that Mrs. Weasley would be uncomfortable in so fine a restaurant, as poor as she was. "Don't you want to come to celebrate with us?"

“I just wouldn’t know what to wear,” said Mrs. Weasley finally.

“Well,” said Hermione, “I’m wearing my one and only maternity dress and it’s nothing special. The important thing is that we’ll together.”

“Of, course you’re right,” said Mrs. Weasley with a smile, reassured. “We’ll I guess we’ll need to alert the whole family?”

“Absolutely!” said Hermione with a great grin. “Ginny, will you run and ask Fred and George if they can join us with Alicia and Angelina?”

“Happily!” said Ginny, practically skipping to the fireplace.

Hermione turned to Ron. “Would you go ask Bill and Fleur if they can come?” Ron smiled and nodded and followed his sister.

“So who has confirmed so far?” asked Harry.

“Only Remus and Tonks,” replied Hermione.

There was a noise from the fireplace and then Ginny stepped through. “Fred and George are in,” she said gaily. “They’re bringing Alicia and Angelina as well.”

“Excellent,” said Hermione.

There was another noise from the fireplace that announced the return of Ron. “Bill and Fleur are coming.”

“Do be sure to invite Hannah,” she said to him with a smile.

Hermione let out a satisfied sigh. This was easier than she had anticipated. “Be sure to let Mr. Weasley know.”

“I’ve just owled him,” confirmed Molly.

“Well, I’d better head home. I’ve got a few details to wrap up.” She gave Mrs. Weasley a last reassuring hug. She didn’t want the matron to feel self conscious or out of place. This was, after all, a happy occasion.

Once Hermione was in her own family room she took a deep breath and let it out slowly. A scratching noise at the kitchen window caught her attention. She walked over and let Mercury in, giving him an owl treat before she removed the responses from his leg. “Dumbledore and McGonagall, yes,” she said before vanishing the note. “The Tonkses, yes.” She vanished the second note with a pleased expression on her face. She counted the names on her guest list and nodded her head. “Reservation for eighteen it is.” Hermione returned to the fireplace and threw in some powder and cried, “The Sorcerer’s Garden.”

Hermione was deposited into a very posh reception room which was furnished with several elegant fireplaces. The walls were hung with rich tapestries and there was marble beneath her feet. She exited the room and walked over to the maître d’ who was standing elegantly behind his podium.

“Excuse me,” she said. “I’m Hermione Black.”

“Of course, Mrs. Black,” he said. “How are you this fine afternoon?”

“I’m well, thank you,” said Hermione. “My husband’s godson just got accepted to the Auror’s Academy and he would like to hold a celebratory dinner here tonight, in his honor.”

“How many in your party?” asked the maître d’.

“Eighteen,” replied Hermione, a bit sheepishly.

He smiled comfortingly. “It is a large party and a bit last minute but we are more than able to accommodate you. We have a few large party rooms for occasions just like yours. Now, what time are the reservations for?”

Hermione breathed a sigh of relief. "Seven thirty."

"Very good," said the maître d'.

"Thank you so much," said Hermione.

"Not at all," he replied. "We'll see you tonight." Hermione gave him a grateful smile before heading back out the way she came.

Once she had returned home she went directly to the kitchen and made a sandwich which she ate with a glass of milk and an apple in front of the television. One program turned into four as she let her mind be completely absorbed by the television. It was easier to do than she would have thought possible. When the grandfather clock chimed at the top of the hour Hermione glanced up and noted that it was five o'clock. Heaving her somewhat ungainly body from her comfortable spot on the couch she ambled off in the direction of the bathroom she shared with Sirius.

After showering she wobbled into the bathroom to find a fresh pair of maternity underwear. Once she had her under things on she looked at herself in the mirror. She couldn't believe how large her belly had grown. The only part of her new look she had any appreciation for were her newly ample breasts. While she was applying her scant amount of makeup she heard Sirius arrive home by floo.

"Hey beautiful," he greeted casually, coming up behind her. He rested his chin on her shoulder while reaching around her body to embrace her belly. Turning her head toward him she kissed his cheek. "Where's Harry?"

"He's at the Burrow with Ginny," she replied. "How was your day?" Sirius released her to change into more comfortable clothes.

"Well," he said from the bedroom, "that bit of legislation from your committee did the trick."

"That's wonderful!" she called back, elated, as she magically dried her hair. "So, when is the vote to abolish the law?"

“Tomorrow,” he said from the doorway to the bathroom. His was changed into a pair of blue jeans, his nicest dragon hide boots and a black silk shirt with an attractive silver pattern running through it. Hermione had commented once that it brought his eyes out. Being far too vain not to remember something like, the shirt had become a favorite. Over all of that he wore his devil-may-care robes from his youth. Hermione lifted her eyes to respond to him but whatever she was going to say got lost on its way to her lips. Her breath caught, which he noticed and smirked at his besotted wife. “Still got it,” he whispered into her ear while nibbling at her neck.

Hermione blushed but didn't look away from his reflection in the mirror. He quickly realized that the moment had turned from playful flirtation to something more meaningful. “Someday I'm going to have to write the ministry a ‘thank you’ note.”

Sirius shook his head and said with complete sincerity, “We would have found each other without their meddling.”

Her soft brown eyes searched his but there was no hint of anything false. “Do you really think so?”

“I have to believe that Hermione. I have to believe that after all life has thrown at me something as wonderful as you was waiting for me.” He took a step forward and turned her by the shoulders to face him. He wrapped his arms around her and whispered in her ear, “You gave my life meaning, Hermione. I am grateful for you everyday.”

Hermione clutched him tightly, tears of emotion overwhelming, little drops of happiness forming at the corners of her eyes. Unable to speak she just nodded and gave herself to moment.

“You should probably finish getting ready.” He stole silently out of the bathroom and let Hermione get composed. Dabbing her eyes and giving herself one last once over she left the bedroom for the closet. Silently thanking her mother for insisting on at least one maternity gown she slipped it over her head and closed the closet door. After slipping into her atrocious yet unbelievably comfortable loafers she

spritzed on a little perfume. She joined Sirius on the couch where he was still getting to know the remote control. Grinning at her as she walked into the family room he showed off his new skills. "I think I've got it!" He proudly turned the volume up and down, changed the channels and then turned the television off. "Ready?" He bounded to his feet.

Nodding her head, Hermione raised her hand for a help up. "Ron got his acceptance letter as well, you know."

"Good," replied Sirius. "I never doubted that Ron would get in but all the same, I'm glad Harry will have a friend at the Academy."

Hermione reached into the little bowl above the fireplace and grabbed a handful of floo powder. One after the other she and Sirius left for their evening at The Sorcerer's Garden.

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Hermione dusted herself off and glanced into one of the mirrors in the posh parlor. Sirius was right behind her and quickly excused himself to check on their reservation. Just as Hermione was satisfied with her reflection Remus stepped through one of the fireplaces followed immediately by Tonks. Tonks flicked her eyes at Hermione, almost shyly, as Remus excused himself to join Sirius.

"Wotcher, Hermione," said Tonks automatically and then dropped her eyes again.

"Hello, Tonks," said Hermione a bit stiffly. The last time she'd been around Tonks the other witch had been a bit cool with her.

"You're really huge!" blurted Tonks and then immediately went red in the face and stared at her shoes.

Realizing that Tonks was trying to make up Hermione laughed, a bit forced but still friendly enough. "I seem to be getting bigger everyday."

Tonks glanced up at Hermione and gave her a shy but genuine smile. "Look Hermione, I'm really sorry. Now that it's all played out I see why you handled it the way you did."

"Thank you." Hermione's return smile was just as genuine. "Sorry if I got a bit shirty with you."

"Nah," offered Tonks. "That last bit for me was just because I was looking forward to working with Sirius."

Hermione's friendly smile turned puzzled. "With you?"

"Yeah, you know, when Dawlish offered Sirius that Auror's position." As soon as the words were out of Tonks' mouth she regretted them. "Surely he told you."

"Actually, replied Hermione, her expression darkening, "he left that bit out. Was this right before he took his seat on the Wizengamut?"

Tonks gave Hermione a pleading expression. "I don't want to get in the middle of this."

"Tonks!" gritted Hermione from between clenched teeth.

Tonks hung her head like a dog. "Fine," she grumbled. "He accepted the position..."

"He accepted it!" snarled Hermione, incredulous.

"But then he turned it down." Tonks rushed her words hoping to make it all better.

"Well, why tell the wife indeed," griped Hermione. She was about to say more when Harry followed by Ginny followed by Ron followed by Hannah all joined them in the parlor.

"Hi!" chirruped Ginny, bright and happy until she saw Hermione's expression. "Oh, no. What's wrong?" Harry and Ron cast worried expressions at Hermione.

“Nothing,” muttered Hermione. “I’ll tell you later.”

“Are you alright?” asked Ron.

“I will be,” vowed Hermione darkly. “Let’s go have fun.” Dubious glances behind her back wondered of that was even possible given her black expression. Nonetheless, Hermione plastered on a plastic smile and left the parlor in the lead.

Sirius and Remus were talking quietly by the maître d’s podium, purposefully giving Hermione and Tonks a chance to talk. Both men were puzzled by Tonks’ anxious face and Hermione’s fake smile. With a prayer for patience Hermione allowed Sirius to link his arm with hers as they followed the maître d’ to their private room.

“Alright, sweet?” asked Sirius.

“Never better,” answered Hermione, her voice falsely saccharine.

Sirius wasn’t convinced in the slightest but he let it go for the moment. He would ask her what happened with Tonks when she could be more open with her answer. The maître d’ opened a set of double doors that led to a large room with a long table. Behind the table was a long window with glass double doors that led to a patio nestled in a luxuriant garden. The garden was complete with a small waterfall that fed a large pond. Despite her fury Hermione felt charmed by the lovely party room.

Hermione and Sirius found seats together with Remus and sitting beside Sirius at Tonks’ urging. She wanted a protective body between herself and Sirius. Harry and Ginny sat across from Sirius and Hermione with Ron and Hannah across from Remus and Tonks. The restaurant wait staff took their drink orders and offered horderves.

Within moments of getting settled Andromeda and Ted Tonks were ushered into the room greeting its inhabitants warmly.

“Don’t get up,” urged Andromeda as she took the seat next to Hermione. “Now tell me, how you’ve been?” Ted settled next to his wife.

Before Hermione could answer Mr. and Mrs. Weasley were ushered in. Upon seeing that they had a private room Mrs. Weasley seemed to release a breath of tightly held air. She and Mr. Weasley took seats across from Ted and Andromeda as they greeted everyone in turn.

The next to arrive were Fred and George, who were escorting Alicia and Angelina. Alicia sat next to Hannah with Fred next to her while Angelina sat next to Tonks with George on her other side. Another round of greetings and congratulations went around as the newcomers settled in. George flicked a paper airplane at Harry that squeaked ‘congratulations’ when he unfolded it. Fred dropped a dungbomb down Ron’s shirt. Sirius roared with laughter. A waiter smiled indulgently and vanished the noxious odor. As each new guest arrived drinks were ordered and delivered, menus were handed out and waiters stood by with a wide variety of horderves needing only a glance to get their attention

Just as conversation began to take form Bill and Fleur joined the party. With a good deal less fanfare than his brothers Bill escorted Fleur to a seat next to his father. As he pulled his chair out to sit next to Fleur she halted his progress with her hand.

“No,” she said in her thick accent. “Seet across frrom mee so I can see your ‘andsome face.”

Ginny rolled her eyes, Mrs. Weasley looked away in embarrassment while Bill, with a smirk, did as he was told.

As the dust was settling in Fleur’s wake, Professors Dumbledore and McGonagall entered the room. McGonagall’s sharp eyes scanned the room and chose a seat next to George Weasley. Although they kept it inaudible you could practically hear the groan from Fred and George. With an indulgent smile for Fred, Dumbledore took his seat across from McGonagall.

As each new guest arrived they had been presented with a menu and their drink order had been taken. The wait staff worked like ghosts, barely noticeable except for the quiet refilling of glasses while also keeping the horderves flowing. After a few moments of quiet conversation and contemplation, food orders were taken and menus were retrieved.

Sirius stood with his wine glass raised and looked his godson in the eye, proudly. "I would that James were here today and Lily, too. In their absence it falls to me to tell you how proud I am of you. It is quite a feat to get accepted to the Academy. I know you are going to do great things. Cheers!" Sirius touched his glass to Harry's which was followed by a round of clicking and congratulations.

Dumbledore's voice cut across the clatter that followed in the wake of the toast. "No one in your lifetime or even mine," said Dumbledore in reference to Grendelwald, "has ever faced down and defeated so great an evil. While it is true we all worked together, in the end it was down to you."

Harry however shook his head. "At the very end it was down to me, Ron, Hermione and Sirius."

"What?" said Sirius startled. "No, son, that was something the three of you did together."

"From the corner of my eye I saw Bellatrix take the shot at Hermione. I was about to turn back for her but then you showed up. I knew then that she would be safe." Sirius smiled and nodded, not really in agreement but too touched to argue.

In total defiance of the moment Fred grinned wickedly at George. "Getting accepted into the Academy is quite an honor. Harry I understand, but Ron has never been a great enforcer of rules."

"Oh, too true," said George. "We were a right pair of rule breakers but our little bro' never put us in our place. Let us get away with murder, he did."

“Too be fair it wasn’t really murder,” said Fred innocently. “But Ronnie hardly stood up for what was right and true, which we weren’t.”

“Like you would have listened to me,” grumbled Ron.

“How can you be sure? You never tried.” George snickered. “Just turned a blind eye.”

“And now you’re off to make the world a safer place, tsk, tsk,” chided Fred.

“Actually, I did the very best thing I could,” said Ron in a superior tone, remembering the one and only time he’d seen someone other than his mother strike fear in the twins hearts.

“Oh, yeah?” scoffed Fred. “When was that?”

“I let Hermione handle it.” Ron nodded to her with a smile.

Hermione arched a challenging brow at Fred and George, daring them to make her tell the tale of hustling first years into testing their skiving snack boxes, a fact as yet unknown to their mother. The twins both swallowed and smiled weakly at Hermione. They realized they were in a corner with their backs against the wall.

“Right terror she was, too,” said George.

“Handled it like a pro, little bro,” gushed Fred. Harry, Ron and Ginny shared a significant smile.

“I am intrigued,” said Sirius quietly to Hermione.

“Oh, you’d be surprised how vicious I can be.” Behind her smile, Sirius read danger and felt a chill slide down his spine. He hadn’t done anything wrong, he was sure of it.

The flash of danger in Hermione's eyes was caught by more than just Sirius. Harry and Ginny exchanged a worried look. They knew the pair rarely fought but when they did, they seemed to fly to extremes.

"Should be interesting at your house tonight," said Ginny under her breath.

Harry nodded and then added. "Maybe I'll bunk with Ron tonight."

"Are you kidding?" hissed Ginny. "They'll need witness to keep from killing each other."

Harry sighed, wishing he knew what set Hermione off. He remembered that Hermione had been talking to Tonks when he arrived. Something had been wrong then. Harry set his green eyes on her as she was just across the table from him, only Remus was between them. It didn't take long for Tonks to feel a set of intense eyes on her. She looked up and when she did Harry flicked his eyes at Hermione. At first Tonks wasn't sure what Harry was trying to get her to look at until she leaned back in her chair. Her instant reaction was to look guilty. Harry's face turned down in a frown.

"I don't know what exactly," said Harry to Ginny, quietly so no one else could hear. "But Tonks has something to do with it."

Ginny popped her head up reflexively, gazing at Tonks as if some magnetic force was pulling her eyes in that direction. Tonks, who had been glancing up at Harry ever since his discovery, caught Ginny's curious look and cringed.

Before anymore could be made of the tense conversation conducted only with glances, the main courses arrived and were presented. Despite the foods elegant, artistic presentation, the portions were generous and judging by the sight and sound of the assembled, divinely delicious.

Andromeda smiled at Hermione, who was clearly enjoying her food and said, "I have a surprise for you."

Hermione politely cleared her mouth before speaking. "Really?" It was the first time all evening she sounded genuinely pleased. Her tone and relaxed posture did not go unnoticed by Sirius. He smiled.

"I'm throwing you a baby shower next month!" Andromeda was delighted with Hermione's pleased smile.

"Oh, that is so wonderful of you!" Hermione was truly touched by the gesture.

"I've got the invitations all made out and ready to send with tomorrow's post." Andromeda winked at Hermione and took a bite of her dinner.

"That reminds me. I was going to write but I may as well just ask you now that I've got you. Can you give me the recommendation of a few good childcare centers?" Hermione cut into her medium rare steak, something she would probably never eat unless of course she was very, very pregnant.

Harry, who had been watching Hermione carefully since his earlier discovery couldn't help notice Sirius stiffen beside her. Now it was Sirius' turn to exhibit a darkened expression. Harry groaned miserably and decided he would need to enlist help. He hadn't caught all of Hermione and Andromeda's conversation so he wasn't exactly sure what Sirius was reacting to. He thought he heard something about a baby shower but that couldn't possibly be what set Sirius off.

Remus who sat between Tonks and Sirius had been getting bombarded with negative emotion all night. It was only a few days until the full moon, heightening his sensitivity to the emotions of those around him. He was most in tune with Tonks, the intensity of her guilt was almost enough to ask her to join him in a stroll around the garden patio that beckoned from the wide expanse of windows.

Less acute was the unmistakable smell of anger that was rolling off of Hermione. He sensed she was keeping it under control but whatever it was, it had her furious.

Across the table he was hit with anxiety which was exuding from Harry and Ginny. Harry he could understand, this night was in his honor and all eyes were on him. But why Ginny?

And then like a blast of hot, noxious gas from a motorcycle tailpipe, anger shocked Remus' sense. His best friend was suddenly raging like a tethered, tormented dog, straining the chain at his neck when only a moment before he had detected a note of quiet anxiety but that was gone now.

Remus looked around in desperation and wondered what the hell was going on? He looked up and took note of Harry's worried furtive glances that were being cast at Sirius and Hermione. Ginny too, was glancing at Sirius. He took a sidelong glance at his fiancé whose eyes were pleading with Harry for understanding. He looked at her plate and noticed she hadn't touched her food. It was impossible that these things were unrelated.

"The garden is lovely," murmured Remus in Tonks' ear. "Would you like to take a stroll with me?" Happy of a reprieve from all the tension she gladly accepted.

Sirius took slow careful breaths in an effort to control himself. Usually when his anger caught him unaware he had difficulty keeping a lid on it. Underneath the anger was hurt. He couldn't believe she was making arrangements for the baby's childcare without even mentioning that it had been on her mind. She didn't even offer him the courtesy of asking his opinion. The pain was stunning. He felt pushed to the side, utterly discounted and even belittled. And coming from her...that was the unkindest cut of all. He endured her conversation as she and Andromeda blithely discussed which set of strangers would raise his children. He tried to tune it out, he wished for some, any excuse to leave but it was impossible.

"So why do you even need childcare, Hermione? You don't work." Andromeda smiled sweetly at Hermione, completely oblivious to the fact that she had just pulled the pin from the grenade.

“I’m planning to go to work for the ministry.” Hermione took another bite from her juicy, red steak.

Sirius abruptly stood and excused himself, claiming he needed to use the loo. Harry and Ginny watched with anxious eyes. Talking with Tonks in the garden prevented Remus from seeing what had just happened.

“Well, he always was an idiot,” muttered the werewolf. “It’s not your fault Dora. It was natural to assume he had already discussed it with Hermione. He certainly should have. I don’t really blame her for being angry.” He pulled Tonks into his arms and kissed the top of her head.

“This is not good,” said Harry darkly. He looked around the table and noticed that everyone else seemed to be having a good time. Bill, Ted and Mr. Weasley were having an animated conversation about muggle inventions. Hannah, Alicia and Angelina were talking shop about the upcoming weddings. Even Fred and George had managed to entertain Professor McGonagall. Only Dumbledore was silent and he was certain he knew why.

The wait staff began to clear away dishes and hand out smaller desert menus as they took orders for coffee. Noticing the movement from within Remus glanced into the private party room, casually taking note of the movement within when a glaring omission was noticed. Sirius had left his own party. A cold clammy feeling took a hold of his spine and slid slowly, sickeningly down. As he considered his options he was distracted by a noise coming from the glass double doors. Harry and Ginny were joining them in the garden.

It only took a glance at Harry to know that something had gone terribly wrong. Briefly they exchanged stories, all parties coming to the same appalling realization.

“I just can’t believe Hermione would consider childcare without discussing it with Sirius.” Remus looked away from the three faces toward the garden around them. The peaceful surroundings offered no solace or comfort. “And then to announce she planned to go to work...you’re certain Sirius was unaware of her plans?”

“That’s when he got up and left,” replied Harry.

Remus sighed heavily. “Well, the only suggestion I have is to insist we all return to their, well, your house.” Remus paused to glance at Hermione who was chatting happily with Andromeda. “Neither will refuse you your right to invite us over, especially tonight.”

Harry nodded. “This is going to be bad isn’t it?”

“Well,” mused Remus, “they are each angry and justifiably so...so I’d say yes. This will be bad although I believe our presence will have a cushioning effect.”

Remus noticed curious glances being tossed in their direction. “We’d better head back in. I’ll see if I can find Sirius.”

While the four of them were returning to the party the man in question reappeared and took his seat beside Hermione. Remus helped Tonks to her seat and as he took his own he smelled the firewhiskey on Sirius’ breath. Remus groaned.

“Alright there, Mooney?” asked Sirius, not drunk but a little loosened up.

“Fine, Padfoot. Thanks. Just creaky joints.” Remus sat and picked up his desert menu. He chose the first thing his eyes landed on and ordered.

Everyone else placed their orders as well and within a few moments the desserts began to arrive. During the interim Harry listened carefully to what Andromeda and Hermione were talking about. Their conversation had turned to girls names. Harry sighed. That was a safe enough of a topic.

Remus was grateful for the lull in emotional bombardment. He could sense that underneath the happy chatter and alcohol a fight was still brewing but some of the steam was siphoned off. His gut instinct told

him that they were playing nice for their guests and that once they were at home each had a piece of mind for the other.

“Sirius, Hermione, you don’t mind if I have a few guests over, after dinner, to sort of keep it going?” Harry put on an innocent, unguarded expression. It was the face of someone who didn’t expect to be denied but was excising courtesy.

“Oh...” Sirius had honestly forgotten that Harry lived with them; such was his focus on what he had to say. Guests certainly presented an obstacle to his current plan.

Hermione glanced at Sirius with a puzzled expression. She certainly knew why she didn’t want more eyes, eyes other than Harry’s, to impede the words she needed to expel but his reticence was odd. Sirius loved company. Realizing there was no way to tell Harry no she looked up with as bright a smile as she could muster and said, “Of course, the more the merrier.”

“Right,” recovered Sirius. “Whoever wants to come over is more than welcome.”

“Great!” Harry looked expectantly around the table.

Mr. and Mrs. Weasley thanked him for the invitation but politely refused as did the Tonkses. Bill and Fleur agreed to come over to which Ginny rolled her eyes. Fred and George along with Alicia and Angelina agreed readily as did Ron and Hannah. Professors Dumbledore and McGonagall pled exhaustion and blamed their advanced years. Remus and Tonks said they would be delighted.

Just when everything seemed to be going so well two things happened at once to completely shatter the carefully contrived calm.

As Ted Tonks was shaking Sirius’ hand good night and thanking him for a lovely evening he also added, “Dora sure was disappointed that she wouldn’t get to work with you but I must say I’m very pleased with the progress you’ve made since you’ve been on the Wizengamut.”

Before Hermione had a chance to even throw a hateful glare at Sirius, Andromeda drew Hermione into a hug and said, "I'll owl you tomorrow with the names of those schools."

The unknowing couple clasped hands, offered parting words of thanks and congratulations and left. Harry closed his eyes and waited for the grenade to detonate.

"So, thinking of being an Auror?" Hermione's hard eyes and icy demeanor confused Sirius for a moment. He was pretty sure he was the one who was angry. "Thanks for keeping me in the loop."

"That's rich," spat Sirius, "considering your offering up our children to strangers so you can do the exact same thing." Hermione took a step back, intimidated for just a moment by Sirius' glower.

Hermione drew a breath for her retort when the lack of friendly chatter caught her attention. Every eye in the room was on them, some wary, some shocked. This was not at all normal for the usually happy couple.

They both realized that this was neither the time nor the place. Schooling their faces into carefully constructed masks, they smiled at their guests.

"Misunderstanding, that's all," said Sirius with a smile, putting his arm around Hermione.

Mr. and Mrs. Weasley smiled nervously at the couple and then wished everyone a fun night. Professors Dumbledore and McGonagall did the same. As he passed Dumbledore whispered something in Sirius' ear that earned a look of contrition from the former felon. The elder wizard smiled kindly at Sirius as he offered his farewells. He paused to speak quietly to Harry and Ron, the two future Aurors and then left with McGonagall, humming as he went.

"Alright," said Sirius with a voice of forced calm, his arm still around Hermione. "Let's go have some fun."

A/N: Thank you so much for the wonderful reviews!

I truly appreciate at all the good will being sent my way but I still haven't found my notebook. As we near the end I'm doing my best to wrap things. I don't want to leave anything hanging.

Miscommunication part 2

Sirius raised the arm that wasn't wrapped around Hermione's waist and gestured toward the door. Despite the strain between them they were still intent on having a houseful, honoring Harry's request to continue the party at home.

Now that the heat of the moment had passed, Sirius was honestly glad of a diversion, already feeling guilty, now that he had to behave, even in the face of his hurt feelings. Everybody made mistakes, even Hermione, who had forgiven several of his blunders, including those that had hurt her. Dumbledore's quiet words were ringing in his ears much to his dismay. She deserved the benefit of the doubt and he had not extended it.

The words he'd said, his tone of voice and the momentary look of fear on Hermione's face were haunting him, eating at him, causing his stomach to burn and bubble. The scene was repeating in his head, compounding his remorse and the shame that came with it.

What was worse was that there had been an audience. It didn't matter to him that she had spoken first because he had been far harsher. At seven months pregnant she had a valid excuse for her irritability.

He looked down at her as they neared the entrance parlor and saw that she looked as repentant as he felt, her eyes down cast, teeth worrying her lower lip. It occurred to him that perhaps they could take care of this before they got home.

When they were just outside the parlor he pulled her to the side. "Wait with me for a minute," he requested quietly. Once the parlor had cleared out and everyone had left for their house they stepped inside.

With earnest voices that burned with regret they said each other's name at the same time. They exchanged a look that conveyed tenderness and repentance and then laughed just a little with neither of them looking away.

They held each other's gaze for several long moments, forgiveness hanging thick between them despite no words having been spoken. This was easier for them than fighting.

Neither was sure how to begin and so the minutes began to stretch as they considered what to say.

Hermione was the first to speak. "Sirius, I'm so sorry. I wasn't thinking. I meant to bring it up this afternoon but then I forgot. I knew Andromeda would know...I just...it really was thoughtless of me."

Sirius shook his head. "It did hurt my feelings but it was more the surprise." His calloused hand tenderly stroked her soft cheek, gently assuring her he was no longer angry. "I am very, very sorry I was so harsh with you. I broke my promise to you and I am just sick about it." Her reaction was to place her head on his chest. He gently stroked her hair while bringing his other hand up to caress her back. "I've missed out on so much in my life. I don't want to miss a single moment of this." He brushed his hand across her belly.

"Still, there will be times when we're both busy," she pressed.

"I was thinking about buying a house elf," he said, teasing and then laughed at her little scowl. "We'll talk it over. We've got a few months yet." He fixed her with a searching gaze, like he dearly wanted to say something but wasn't sure how it would be received. "Are you really thinking about working for the ministry? How will you keep up with F.L.E.M.?"

"I'm worried that I won't have enough to do," she said, not moving from her refuge within his arms.

"Really? You know just because F.L.E.M. can get by without you temporarily does not mean that it will run efficiently for any length of time." He tipped her chin up with a finger under her jaw.

"It just seemed to be doing so well without me," she said with a small frown.

“Maybe that was part of the problem,” he observed casually.

“Maybe,” she answered back after several minutes, considering his words carefully. “We really do have a lot of work ahead of us. We’ve only tackled this one issue so far.”

“Hmmm,” he responded, letting her draw her own deductions.

“I did feel a little left out,” she finally concluded. “I’m so oversensitive lately.”

“Perfectly natural, I’m sure,” he soothed.

“It really is a full time job isn’t?” she mused, almost to herself.

“I would think so,” he kissed her mouth tenderly, relishing the taste of forgiveness, both his and hers. He pulled away and let her lean into him.

“Why didn’t you tell me that you had accepted the position Dawlish offered?” She didn’t look up, preferring the comfort of his arms, her head against his chest.

“Well, because I didn’t. I told him I would accept the position but I had to talk to you first.” He buried his head in her hair, breathing in her scent.

She turned her face up to his. “So why didn’t you?”

His expression darkened, a scowl touched his lips. “You were attacked that same day. After we talked in St. Mungo’s I made up my mind to take up my seat on the Wizengamut. When we got home I didn’t want to trouble you with Dawlish’s offer. You had enough to deal with. It just didn’t seem that important. To be honest I never even got back to Dawlish.”

“So you wanted the job?” she asked. “I was surprised you would willingly work for someone else.”

Sirius let his lips curve up on one side in a jagged smile. "It sounded like fun, fighting the good fight, getting my hands dirty again."

"Actually, that does sound like you," she amended. "You'd be a lot happier doing that than what you are now, wouldn't you?"

"After this vote is complete tomorrow I'm cutting back on the amount of time I work with the Wizengamut." He paused to take a deep breath. "I want to take Dawlish up on his offer if it still stands."

"I'm really grateful that you did that for me, the Wizengamut," Hermione glanced up at him, meeting his eyes before looking at his lips briefly and then away. Sirius cupped her face with both hands and touched her lips with his.

At first her hands rested lightly on his chest as their lips moved together rhythmically, though dryly. One of his hands crept away from her face to cradle her head, wrapping his hand up in her hair. He parted her lips with his and tasted her lower lip. Hermione sighed and leaned into him.

Instinctively her small, soft hands slid upward and linked around his neck. Responding to his moist entreaty she gladly gave him what he wanted, moaning softly as his tongue caressed hers.

His other hand slid down her neck to her shoulder, gliding under her arm to slip around to her back. He tried to pull her closer but at seven months pregnant it was impossible. She pulled away, laughing at her belly when he turned her swiftly, surprising her and pushed her gently against the wall. Leaning into her, his lips and tongue were insistent, even urgent.

Leaving his neck, her fingers stole into his hair, luxuriating in the feel of his soft, silky locks. She broke away for air but Sirius's lips never left her face. He nibbled along her jaw, continuing down her neck, sucking and nipping at her soft skin. Hermione's breath was coming in short gasps punctuated by quiet mewling moans of pleasure.

Completely consumed with each other they forgot where they were until a member of the wait staff checked the entrance parlor. The restaurant was trying to close and he was making the nightly rounds. His surprised gasp caused the couple to turn as one to look at him. Hermione giggled and placed her hands on Sirius' chest, pushing him back slightly.

"We should probably head home," he said, smug.

"Oh my goodness!" She looked at him sheepishly. "I completely forgot about our company."

"Say you're tired and go lay down."

"Why?" She reached for some floo powder.

"I'll make it worth your while," he whispered into her ear. He was not excited by the prospect of dealing with people in his home. He dearly wanted to get her alone, to finish what they'd started. "After a few minutes I'll 'check' on you."

"We'll see," she answered coyly, not at all sure that she wanted to be so obvious despite her current state.

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The scene Hermione and Sirius returned home to was raucous and joyful, the stereo thumping happily to 'You're Just What I Needed' by The Cars, dating Sirius' music collection. The entire group was seated at the dining room table which had a bottle of firewhiskey as the centerpiece. The chatter and laughter paused when they made their entrance. Each head turned toward the couple with cautious eyes. Sirius wrapped his arms around Hermione, just above her belly and nibbled at her neck, reassuring the group that all was well once again. The tension dissipated and the happy chatter resumed.

"I believe it was your turn," said Fred wickedly to Bill.

Bill filled his shot glass and knocked it back and then his eyes glinted with mischief. "Never have I ever mucked out a chicken coop without the use of magic." He pushed the bottle to Fred who groaned along with George, Ginny and Ron.

"So who asks the next question if more than one person has to drink?" asked Harry.

"The person who asked the last question picks," answered Sirius, approaching the table with a huge grin.

"Don't think you're getting out of playing," said Remus to Sirius with a snicker.

"Wouldn't dream of it," returned Sirius with a touch of pride.

"What are the rules?" asked Hermione curiously, having never watched a drinking game much less played one.

Fred grinned at her from across the table. "Well...someone starts by stating something they have never done, something they know or think someone else has." He poured his shot and handed the bottle across the table to George.

He took the bottle from Fred and poured the amber liquid into his glass. "Preferably something embarrassing." George reached across Harry to hand the bottle to Ginny. "Then the guilty party or parties must drink."

"The girls won't last long." Bill winked at his little sister. "That's other part of the game...take out as many people as you can, get them too drunk to go on."

"I don't think it's fair that Hermione gets out of playing if we couldn't," chortled Ginny as she poured her shot. "I think Sirius should have to drink for her." She couldn't do her shot in one, making a horrible face while getting booed by her brothers. She glared at them as she finished off her drink.

“I believe you are laboring under the misapprehension that I have a low tolerance for alcohol.” Sirius conjured two chairs at Remus’ end of the table. He helped Hermione into her chair and took his seat next to Ginny. “Bring it on.” He grinned cheekily at her.

“It’s true,” agreed Remus. “He’s usually the last man standing.”

Ginny pushed the bottle across the table to Ron. “I’ve got one, Bill. Pick me!”

Ron poured his shot and tipped the contents of the glass into his mouth, immediately spluttering with a choking cough. The whole table snickered at him as his face reddened with embarrassment.

Bill nodded to Ginny. “Alright...go.”

“Never have I ever been caught by Mum snogging Ron behind the chicken coop.” Ginny smiled at Hannah who had been rather quiet all night.

“That’s a relief,” snarked Fred, earning a few snickers. Ginny rolled her eyes at him because she knew that he knew she was only trying to help Hannah feel included.

Hannah blushed amid a few chuckles as her boyfriend poured the shot for her. “I’ve never tasted firewhiskey,” she admitted shyly.

“No time like the present,” said George with a smirk.

Hermione grinned at Hannah, feeling more than a little sympathetic when instead of downing it in one it took her a few tries. She shivered with each sip as her face flushed hot each time. When she was finally finished she waved her hand in front of her face and let out a quiet cough. Hermione tuned the game out as she leaned over her chair to kiss Sirius on the cheek. “That would be me, wouldn’t it?” she joked.

Sirius turned to look at her, surprised, as though something had just occurred to him. “I’ve never seen you drunk.” He sounded incredulous.

“I’ve only had a few sips of brandy or wine, a little champagne at our wedding,” she confessed.

“Hmmm...” he murmured.

“What?” she asked, intrigued by the mischievous look on his face.

“Nothing, just something I’ll need to see someday, after the twins are born,” he grinned at her and then winked, turning his attention back to the game.

“Finally!” said George. “I wondered when the man of the hour would get to drink.”

George passed the bottle in front of Alicia to Harry. He poured his shot and easily tossed it down his throat, having gotten a little more experience at drinking than was necessary while living with Sirius. He had taken it as a personal offence that James’ son hadn’t ever touched the stuff. Without missing a beat Harry grinned at Hermione. “Never have I ever had a boggart turn into academic failure.” He conjured a shot glass and pushed it past Ginny to Sirius, looking directly at Hermione.

“Oh, no,” said Sirius. “He’s joking right?” He gave her a look that was humorously sad. Remus chuckled quietly at the memory. She frowned at them both, elbowing Sirius in the side just before he took the shot. He put his glass back down and let his fingers stroke the underside of her arm. “You’re turn,” said Sirius softly.

“Never have I ever been under the effect of a love potion.” She raised her eyebrow at Ron who colored brightly.

“You’re supposed to be on my team,” whispered Sirius into her ear before nipping at her lobe. He chuckled softly when she shivered and then poured another shot.

“Oh...oops!” Hermione giggled at her error. “I meant that for Ron.” Sirius surprised her by sliding the bottle past both her and Tonks to

Remus. He pulled his arm back, resting his hand on the back of her neck, massaging gently with his fingers.

Remus chuckled lightly at some shared memory, poured the shot and pushed the bottle past Hannah to Ron. "Who picks?" he asked Hermione.

"Oh...", she smiled at Sirius. "You go." He dropped his hand to her lap and gave her thigh a squeeze.

"Never have I ever fallen on my arse while attempting to corner a werewolf for a kiss." Sirius barked out a laugh at Tonks' red face.

"You are never going to let me live that down are you?" grumbled Tonks. Fred and George were falling apart with laughter as Ron passed the bottle to Tonks with a snicker.

"Not if I live to be one hundred and eighty," snarked Sirius. Hermione squirmed as he continued to torture her thigh with his fingers.

Tonks picked up the bottle and twisted off the cap. Somehow while pouring she managed to let the bottle slip out of her hand, knocking the full shot glass into Hannah causing her to yelp. The now empty glass bounced off her lap and onto the floor. The cap to the bottle flew across the table and hit Alicia in the forehead who squeaked in surprise. There was a small red mark where the cap had made contact.

Remus was able to grab the bottle before it spilled but Hannah now had a large, reeking wet spot down the front of her dress. "Oh, god I'm so sorry," said Tonks miserably as the whole table howled in laughter.

"You do know you're supposed to drink it?" asked Sirius sarcastically. He lazily flicked his wand at Hannah, instantaneously removing the alcohol from her soaked dress. Another couple of flicks and the cap was returned to the bottle and the glass was back in front

of Tonks. "Remus," said Sirius with a touch of exasperated patience that was clearly aimed at Tonks. "Would you please do the honors?"

"Be nice," admonished Hermione.

"I can take the mickey out of my own cousin," defended Sirius with a wink at Tonks. She smiled weakly and drank the shot that Remus had poured for her. While Sirius was occupied with Hermione, Remus whispered something into Tonks' ear. Her hand flew to her mouth as she stifled a soft laugh.

"Never have I ever sung 'God Save The Queen' in the Great Hall at Hogwarts during dinner." Her smirk was triumphant and full of mock revenge.

"That's cheating," grumbled Sirius, glaring at Remus. "It was a prank James played on me," he explained as the table broke out in another round of laughter, even Hermione couldn't suppress a snicker. After a moment Sirius himself chuckled and then drank his liquid reprimand. He looked around the table, selecting the next victim. "Never have I ever been caught trying to slip a love potion to Mad Eye Moody."

"Oh, I remember that," giggled Ginny sloppily, her one shot clearly having an effect. "Mum lost her nut over that one." A ridiculous giggle erupted out of Hannah, who blushed immediately afterward.

"I thought she was going to kill them," snickered Ron as he draped his arm around Hannah.

"She nearly did kill us," confirmed Fred as Sirius slid the bottle down the table to him. "The old codger always fell asleep at Headquarters, would've been easy to slip it into his flask."

"Who were you trying to make him fall in love with?" asked Angelina eyeing her fiancé suspiciously.

"Snape," snickered George as he took the bottle from Fred.

“It would have been beautiful.” Fred took his shot and got a soft, dreamy expression at the thought of Mad Eye Moody swooning over Snape.

“Should have asked for my help,” said Sirius darkly with malicious humor. Hermione looked at him with mild reproof, which he ignored as he increased the pressure on her thigh. He might not be allowed to hate Snape now but he could certainly hate him then. What he wouldn’t have given for a piece of entertainment like that!

George threw back his shot and looked at Sirius. “Who’s your pick?”

“Go on then,” said Sirius then turning back to Hermione. “Having fun?” He drew their attention away from the game.

“Yeah, I’m just a little tired,” she said with a grin, intent on teasing, if not delivering. He was about to answer when their attention was distracted by Fleur.

The French girl wheezed and gasped for air. “Zat eez ‘orrible,” she said in a throaty hiss. Bill’s quiet chuckle earned him a glare but he just smiled, totally at ease and stroked her back with his hand.

“You’re turn,” coaxed Bill.

“Zee girlz are not getteeng to play...ohhh...I know... Never have I ever agreed with ‘ermione about zee bridesmaid’s dresses.”

“Nicely done,” said Fred with real admiration.

One by one, Ginny, Tonks, Angelina and Alicia took their shots with a variety of pained facial expressions and noises of distaste. Sirius did Hermione’s with a chuckle as the giggling around the table escalated with Ginny in the lead. She suddenly stopped and shushed the table dramatically. “We’re not leaving this table until we have a name for that baby girl!” She issued her command, her voice slightly slosy as she looked at each person in turn as though it was their fault the female twin didn’t have a name.

As the bottle got passed around Hermione noticed Ron and Hannah speaking quietly about something and then Ron spoke. "We're sorry but we've got to run. We've both got work in the morning."

"I had a lot of fun," said Hannah with genuine sincerity.

"We'll definitely have to get together more," said Hermione as she accepted Hannah's departing hug.

With a last few calls of 'good night' and 'had a great time,' she and Ron left by way of the Floo network.

"What about Pleione?" asked Tonks, returning to the baby naming.

Ginny suddenly giggled, clearly feeling the effects of her shots. "It rhymes with Hermione!"

Harry, who had been the last to drink shook his head sadly at his girlfriend. "Never have I ever pierced my ear."

"Impressive," said Fred admiringly.

"That is the most so far," agreed George.

Bill, Fleur, Angelina, Alicia, Ginny and Tonks passed the bottle from one to the other, each taking a shot. Sirius had to drink for two. Harry grinned at his godfather. "What are you up to now?"

"A fair few," replied Sirius without the slightest trace of a slur even though he was leading the table in the number of shots. He was feeling the affects but still had a long way to go before he would be outwardly drunk. His daring only, what he would try to get away with, was emboldened at this point. A point of fact Hermione could attest to as she squirmed in her seat, fingers in places they ought not be with a table full of friends.

"You go," said Harry. "You've earned it."

Sirius smiled at Remus, his lips rife with iniquity. "Never have I ever kissed my best friend's girlfriend."

Remus sighed heavily. Sirius knew where all the bodies were buried and he'd been drinking for two. "For the record," said Remus. "She kissed me and she wasn't his girlfriend at the time."

"Who?" asked Tonks a little loudly, a laugh in her voice, her shots working their will in her brain. Her grin was irrepressible, loving this little secret about her fiancé's youth. "If you don't tell me I know Sirius will!" Remus shook his head and pleaded with Sirius with his eyes.

"Oh, grow up, Mooney!" said Sirius largely, the light in his eyes dancing. "We were in what...our fourth year?"

"Yeah, well that didn't stop him from being crazy for her," said Remus, betraying the guilt he still felt over a childhood misstep.

"Which is why you're so naughty," said Sirius impishly. Remus glared at him and tossed back his shot. Caught up in Remus' struggle to keep his secret a secret, the table watched Sirius toy with him with rapt attention. All except for Fleur who sighed loudly, bored.

"Tell me Sirius!" commanded Tonks, banging her palms on the table for emphasis.

"She is my cousin," teased Sirius. "I really should tell her. She has a right to know what sort of man she is marrying."

Remus rolled his eyes. "Oh fine, then." He paused to look at Harry. "You see, she was friends with me a long time before she would talk to this joker or your father, Harry."

"She?" asked Harry, confused for a moment as to why Remus was addressing him. "Wait...mum?" Harry's voice was shocked.

"Remus was her first crush," confirmed Sirius, laughing freely.

Harry looked stunned for a moment and then he laughed out loud. "You thought I would be angry over something that happened in fourth year?"

Remus smiled sheepishly at Harry, it was a young look, even a look he might have given James in apology. It struck Hermione, rather sharply, how in many respects these two were still so young in their minds, like time had stopped for them on October the thirty first, nineteen eighty one.

"Well, gents, ladies," said Bill amiably. "It's time for us to run."

Impatient to leave, Fleur did not wait for Bill to help her up. "Eet was wonderful getteeng to spend time with you."

Hermione smiled politely. "We'd love for you to visit us more often."

Fleur and Bill gave a few departing words to the group and then left for home.

"I got it!" said Angelina excitedly. "I've got a great name!"

Fred tickled her side making her jump. "Well, let's have it."

"It's on the same constellation as Sirius," she said to the group. "It means 'the maidens' so it would be a perfect girls name." She paused for dramatic effect, enjoying the attention of the entire group.

"Well, spit it out," said George, breaking the tension a little.

"Adhara," said Angelina proudly.

Hermione and Sirius looked at one another, both loving that the star in question resided in the same heavenly home as Sirius' own. "Adhara Lily," murmured Sirius softly, with his eyes fastened on her. The corners of her mouth turned up sweetly, happily, as she nodded her head.

“I love it,” she said tenderly and for an instant it was just the two of them basking in the emotion of the moment.

“What a pretty name,” said Remus, bringing them back into the group.

“Thank you, Angelina.” Hermione’s eyes were shining with her appreciation.

“Rasalas James and Adhara Lily,” said Sirius proudly.

“Never have I ever picked out names for my children,” said George playfully. “That’s two for you, Sirius!”

“It’s not your turn,” growled Sirius.

“Oh, well...I concur,” said Remus helpfully, grinning.

Hermione rolled her eyes while Alicia thumped George affectionately. “You really know how to spoil a moment.”

“I do what I can,” he said modestly, like he had been given a compliment.

“Who picks?” Fred asked his twin, enjoying the joke immensely.

“I think Hermione,” he replied.

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Hermione had never seen Sirius directly after a night of such hard drinking. He used to drag himself back to number twelve, Grimmauld Place in the afternoon, having tidied just a bit. He had in fact been the last man standing. Tonks was the first to be defeated, crawling up to Ron’s room to sleep it off. Then Harry and Ginny had helped each other up the stairs and finally the twins and their fiancés straggled off for home. In the end it was just Remus and Sirius.

Hermione was feeling rather smug with all the dirt she had learned about Sirius. The drunker they got, the more personal it got. In the beginning she was a little jealous that she couldn't participate but by the end she was gleeful that she could remember every little piece of scandalous information.

In an act of angelic compassion she had gone to Diagon Alley early that morning and purchased five hangover remedies. Harry and Ginny could sleep in if they wanted but the other three had to go to work the next day, a fact their inebriated minds neglected to remember. Once she returned home she had made a large breakfast and then went to wake Sirius.

Remedy in hand, she sat on his side of the bed and coaxed him gently into consciousness. Before he could get himself into trouble with words he didn't mean she offered him the remedy. The look of profound gratitude made her snicker at the pain he must surely be feeling. It took a minute for the potion to work, having a bit of an after affect that caused his eyes to lose focus and then cross. A giddy smile touched his face as the hangover was sent packing.

"Thank you."

"Your welcome. I've got breakfast ready. Tonks and Remus are up in Ron's room. Would you go wake them for me? They've got work as well." She adopted a business like tone to encourage his participation.

"Oh, god. Work." Sirius looked at her with genuine horror.

"The vote is today. You have to go," she reminded.

"Fuck."

"Language," she said primly, teasing him a little.

That made him grin, this fussy, prudish little witch, at least at first glance, who was married to the likes of him. He grinned even wider when he thought about what it took to get that same word to leave her sweet lips. "Really? You know people who live in glass houses..."

“I do not use that word,” she protested.

“Don’t you?” he challenged. His grin became positively wolfish.

“That doesn’t count,” she whined, wanting him to agree with her.

“Hmmm,” he said doubtfully. Flustered, mostly because he had never called her on it, she tried to get up only to be pulled back down. “It’s our secret,” he whispered seductively. “Because I like it when you beg me to...” he paused, letting his lips curl in an immoral smile, “...fuck you.” He said the last two words slowly, in her ear, tickling her with his hot breath, drawing the moment out for greater impact.

Hermione trembled beside him; all ability to think rationally fled her mind. Work? Vote? Ridiculous!

Sirius held her gaze heatedly, brushing his fingers along her neck and collarbone, watching her pupils as they slowly dilated and listened to her breath become a pant.

“Fuck me,” she whispered breathlessly.

“Can’t,” he said regretfully, getting up. He just wanted to tease her back, remind her that he knew where she lived.

“What!” she sat up on the edge of the bed and watched him dress in utter disbelief.

He pulled a shirt on over his sweats and walked back over to the bed. He put a hand on either side of her thighs as he leaned slowly into her. “Just so we’re clear,” he said, his voice full of mirth. “I’m not the only one with a filthy mouth.”

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Sirius was sat in the round chamber, fidgeting, waiting for the tally to come back. It looked to him like the votes were in favor of abolishing

'Malfoy's law.' He wanted to bring home some good news for Hermione. The vote however, was not why he was fidgeting.

He hated this job. He was entirely bored and after this vote wouldn't have to continue on with it. He couldn't wait to leave. Now that he had accepted his hereditary seat it couldn't be removed from him. Like the burnt out manor and the gold in Gringotts, it was just something that came with being a Black. For most purebloods it was unthinkable to turn their back on the power granted to them by birth but he was not most purebloods. He could rescind it if he wanted to but it appealed to him to hang on to it for those times when Hermione needed an extra voice for whatever cause she was working. In short...he was going to play a lot of hooky.

Sirius looked up as Kingsley took the podium. He pounded the gavel to get the room's attention. "The ayes have it!" Sirius smiled. She would be pleased.

Kingsley began to speak about some other matter as Sirius rose to leave. He was the only one who was leaving and did so as quietly as he could. He opened the door to the chamber and stepped out into the hallway. He murmured 'pardon me' a few times as he maneuvered around a crowd of witches and wizards who were waiting to testify for the next big issue. Once he was clear of them he made a beeline for the Apparition room.

Just as he was about to turn the corner into the main hall he spied the very man he had been thinking of earlier. "Dawlish!" he called out, hoping to pause him. The Auror paused and turned toward Sirius, looking for whomever had called his name. Sirius hurried over with a large smile on his face. "I was hoping to run into you sometime soon." The grim look on the other wizard's face caused his smile to diminish. "What's wrong?"

"Malfoy," gritted Dawlish. "I'm bloody well tired of letting that little twerp go free."

"Well," said Sirius brightening up, "I've got excellent news for you then."

“Well unless you’ve come to tell me that I’m allowed to abuse my authority I don’t think it will help my mood.” Dawlish was only half joking.

“I’ve just come from the vote,” replied Sirius, a bit more sober, his voice thick with satisfaction.

“Oh,” said Dawlish. “And?”

“The next time you catch that cunt beating up a pregnant woman you’re allowed a hint of brutality,” said Sirius with a malignant smile.

“I don’t suppose you’ve given any thought to my offer. It still stands.” Dawlish was bouncing on the balls of his feet in excitement.

“Actually, yeah, I would like to take you up on it, if the same conditions still apply.” Sirius wondered if Dawlish was hinting at what he thought he was.

“Absolutely, we’ll work around your schedule.” Dawlish leveled Sirius with a look that wasn’t clearly defined. “So, are you busy now?”

“No,” said Sirius carefully.

“Care for a little conflict of interest?” asked Dawlish.

“I’d love some,” said Sirius wickedly.

“Brilliant!” Dawlish clapped Sirius on the back. “We’ve just taken a report.”

“Point the way.” Sirius didn’t think this day could get any better.

[illegible]

A/N: Thank you for the reviews.

So, when I tried to write a nasty fight they just refused to cooperate. They seemed rather put out that I had gotten them into a fight in the first place and then Sirius said something rather rude about keeping my personal troubles out of his love life...

Seeing Red

The brisk breeze that skipped thought the Mould-on-the-Wold neighborhood promised the advent of fall and cooler days to follow. The sun was just setting and Sirius and Tonks were hoping that the failing light wouldn't betray their whereabouts before they reached their destination.

The few months after Mad Eye Moody's retirement had left Tonks without a partner. Although it was usually against policy to pair relatives into teams the thinly stretched Department of Auror's was left with no choice.

As it turned out, they actually made a good unit and had thus far only been eluded by one of the suspects they were sent to apprehend: Draco Malfoy.

The day that Sirius and Dawlish were sent out on a call of muggleborn bashing, the same day 'Malfoy's law' had been abolished, they came upon Draco Malfoy, Vincent Crabbe and Gregory Goyle beating up a former school mate, Justin Finch-Fletchley. Crabbe and Goyle were holding up the slightly built young man while Malfoy punched him repeatedly in the stomach. When Malfoy caught sight of Sirius, for whom he had a great deal of fear, he spun and vanished on the spot, leaving his cronies in the lurch.

Dawlish had seen enough to file charges against Malfoy and issue a warrant for his arrest. Unfortunately, Malfoy had proven to be a bit slippery and difficult to obtain.

Rounding the corner, Tonks caught sight of Malfoy entering the pub their informant had said he was known to frequent. She jumped back, bumping into Sirius' chest and nearly taking them both to the ground. Sirius caught himself on the wall and steadied her with a low chuckle.

"I take it you saw him," asked Sirius, managing to keep the excitement out of his voice.

“Yes,” replied Tonks, not fooled by his casual exterior. “I need to say something before we do this.”

“What?” asked Sirius, a little too tersely.

“Remus said,” she began but was cut across by Sirius.

“I’m not going to kill him, Nymphadora,” he hissed between clenched teeth. “As much as I might want to...”

“Oh,” she said, taken off guard. “Well...ok, then.”

“It would bother Hermione,” explained Sirius. “She’d feel guilty if I became a killer, a murderer, because of Malfoy. She would blame herself.”

“You’ve never?” asked Tonks curiously.

“NO!” answered Sirius, offended.

“Not even in the first war?” she pressed.

“Not even then,” replied Sirius. “Not that I didn’t try.”

“Pettigrew?” asked Tonks. Sirius nodded but said nothing. “What if you ran across him now?”

“Hermione has nothing to do with Pettigrew,” answered Sirius evasively.

“Still,” pressed Tonks.

“Is Malfoy still inside the pub?” asked Sirius, getting back on task and away from hypothetical questions regarding his morality.

Tonks peered around the corner. “Don’t know, guess we’d better take a closer look.”

Night had fallen, bringing with it a slight chill that nipped at them as they crossed the street together. Most of the businesses on this street were retail stores that had already closed up shop for the day. As they neared the pub, they could hear music playing on a scratchy, outdated sound system. The smell of fried food wafting out along the night air reminded them both that they hadn't eaten in hours.

Through the pub's large expanse of windows, decorated with frayed, yellowed curtains, they could see Malfoy, sitting alone in a corner booth, sipping amber liquid from an ice filled double old fashioned.

"How do you want to play this?" asked Tonks.

Sirius shrugged. "When he sees you he'll make a run for it. Block his exit out the back and I'll nab him as he leaves out the front." A voice in the back of his head cautioned him that perhaps he should not be the one to arrest Malfoy. He wanted it too much and so resolutely ignored the warning from his conscience. It made sense, he convinced himself, incase Malfoy tried to over power Tonks with his strength.

Not that she was a witch or had a wand or knew magic.

Tonks gave Sirius a last wary look before ducking into the pub while Sirius waited just outside the entrance. He watched through the window as Tonks slid into the booth across from her cousin, wand at the ready, and grinned at him. Just as expected, Malfoy made a dash for the back exit but with a flick of her wand Tonks prevented him from taking that route.

Sirius was fine, even tempered and in control, until he met the haughty, insolent blue eyes that bore a family resemblance to his own grey. When he looked into Malfoy's face his memory flashed to the day that he learned they would be having twins. As he threw Malfoy up against the wall his mind's eye was locked vividly on the memory of the dark purple bruise just under Hermione's rib cage.

Malfoy's head made contact with the brick and mortar with a sickening crack, pulling a pained groan from the blond. As Sirius drew his fist back to punch Malfoy in the face he remembered rounding the

corner onto Knockturn Alley and seeing Hermione slumped in a heap on the ground.

Malfoy's head flew back against the bricks once again, this time his eyes rolled back in his head. He began to slide down the wall, slipping into unconsciousness as Sirius landed another punch, this time in the stomach.

Before Sirius could land another blow on the near lifeless body of Draco Malfoy he was suddenly flung back forcefully, a good ten feet, landing on his arse in the middle of the street. Shaking his head he looked up to see Tonks tending to the heap of bloodied flesh that was his youngest Death Eater cousin.

Sirius picked himself up and dusted off his robes and as he did so he slowly came to his senses. He had intended to simply bind Malfoy and take him into custody.

He understood why, as a fellow husband and father, Dawlish had given him this assignment but the head of the Department should have more impartiality. He should have never given Sirius the job of arresting Malfoy.

At least Tonks had the foresight not to send him into the pub where there would be witnesses to his brutal act. As he walked over he started to feel ashamed of himself for losing control and wondered how he would explain this to Hermione.

"Are you alright?" she called from the wall.

"Yeah, how's he?" he asked, walking slowly forward, stretching the fingers in the hand that had made contact with Malfoy.

"He's fine, all patched up," she replied. "I think he was knocked out after his head hit the wall the first time. He won't remember a thing and if he does a Memory Charm will sort him."

"You – you...watched?" asked Sirius, stunned.

“Prat had a good beating coming, didn’t he?” was her reply.

“I could have killed him,” breathed Sirius as she magically bound and then revived him.

“Nah, not with me watching,” answered Tonks. “I had a feeling something like this might happen. I’d have done it myself but I’m better with a wand.”

Malfoy slowly opened his eyes and struggled weakly against his bonds until he caught sight of Sirius’ gaze on him. “Keep – keep him away from me!”

“Not nearly as brave without your mates are you?” asked Tonks with a wry grin. “You resisted arrest and that is another mark against you. Maybe there is an open cell next to your father. You two can keep each other company.”

Unable to move in any meaningful way and too scared of his bigger, older cousin to mouth off, Malfoy opted to stay still and glare. If it were anyone but Sirius and Tonks, his own flesh and blood, he might be pitching a fit about his poor treatment.

“I got it from here,” assured Tonks.

“Sure?” asked Sirius.

“Don’t you have a one year anniversary or some such thing?” Tonks grinned at Sirius and then gave him a wink.

Malfoy mumbled something under his breath.

“You want to say that so I can understand you?” snarled Sirius, taking a step toward the blond. Tonks positioned herself in between them and pushed against Sirius’ chest.

“Go home to that pretty, pregnant wife of yours,” she instructed.

“Happy Anniversary, baby!” he replied as he sat next her, letting her arms encircle him.

“You should have woken me up before you left,” she chided gently.

“You need your rest.” He leaned into her as best he could with her belly acting as a third person between them and gave her a light kiss. “So, how are you feeling?”

“Hot, uncomfortable...my feet are swollen, I can’t concentrate.” She sighed heavily and rubbed her belly. “I’m so glad this is almost over.”

“It won’t be long now,” he said in a soothing voice. “By the way...I thought we talked about stairs and how you don’t belong on them.”

“I Apparated down here,” she said, smiling at his grouchy face.

“Clever witch,” he said, complimenting her. “I should have known something like being banned from stairs wouldn’t keep you out of your library.”

“Not a chance!” she said with a pleased grin. “So, did you keep your promise?”

“Yes, I bought no extravagant gifts for this anniversary,” he said sincerely with special emphasis on ‘this.’ “Our real anniversary, however, is another matter.”

“This wasn’t exactly a happy day for either of us,” she said, remembering.

“True, but it did give me you and I think that earns it some consideration,” he said with a soft smile.

“So what non-extravagant thing did you do?” she asked suspiciously.

“Nothing much,” he answered. “But I did stop by the Sorcerer’s Garden for dinner. They don’t usually do take out but they did a special favor for me.”

“That was really thoughtful for you,” she said, leaning into him to kiss his cheek. “Thank you.” She really didn’t feel like going out despite the occasion. There was something bitter about this anniversary but also something incredibly sweet. It would have been wrong not commemorate it in some form or fashion.

“I was thinking,” he mused. “That for our real anniversary we should take a little vacation. I bet Molly and your mum wouldn’t mind watching the little ones while we snuck away.”

“Mmm...” she agreed. “You don’t think they’ll be too young?”

“Nah, my mum left Reg and me with our grandmum all the time,” he gave a little involuntary shudder. “Besides, parents need a break too, even if it is just a small one to a tiny Caribbean island.”

“Caribbean?” she asked with an excited tone.

“I was thinking, yeah,” he answered. “We can’t keep going back to Mexico. Time to branch out.”

“Mexico,” she said with a little sigh. Sirius grinned at her and nuzzled her neck.

“I’m going to go set up dinner. You just relax and,” he gave her a sympathetic look, “try to be comfortable.” He ascended the stairs and left her to her reading in her nearly frozen underworld.

Once he had set everything up, making it perfect like he believed she deserved; candles, red roses and an immaculate table, he tromped back down the stairs to collect her.

“Hungry?” he asked.

“Always,” she confirmed, bringing a chuckle from him.

“Meet you up there, then,” he turned around on the stairs and headed back up.

When he reached the dining room she had her nose buried in a red rose, inhaling deeply. “Thank you. Even when you’re not supposed to spoil me, you do.”

“It was nothing,” he assured her, pulling a chair out for her and helping her into it. “By the way, I have some good news for.”

“Oh?” she asked, as he took his seat.

“That arrest Tonks and I were on was successful,” he answered, smiling when her eyes fluttered with her first bite.

“Who was the bad guy?” she inquired. “This is delicious.”

“Draco Malfoy,” he replied with a large smile.

“They let you arrest Malfoy? Are they mental?” The look of shock and disbelief was genuine. “Is he in one piece?” She thought it was incredibly irresponsible of the Department.

“He’s fine, I mean, he’s fine now,” he answered. “I honestly thought I could handle it until he was close to me and then I sort of lost it.”

“What did Tonks do?” asked Hermione, feeling tense.

“Well,” he said quietly, looking intently at a spot on the ceiling. “She let me work out some of my aggression and then got me out of the way.”

Hermione pursed her lips and shook her head. “They shouldn’t have put you in that position.”

“I should have known better,” said Sirius. “I came damn close to using the Killing Curse on him that day on Knockturn Alley.”

“I thought as much,” she said, her voice soft. “I would never want you to become a murderer because of me.”

“I know,” he said, nodding. “I know that, I would try my hardest to never do that to you.” They were quiet for awhile as they ate in companionable silence, soft tones from the stereo reaching them in the dining room. “So,” said Sirius after wiping his mouth with his napkin, “what do you want to do for your birthday?”

“Harry’s only been gone a week and I already miss him. It would be nice to see him but that’s probably too much to ask,” she replied.

Sirius smiled a smug grin. "Well, you're not supposed to know but he's coming home that weekend, so is Ron."

“Really?” her face lit up with a huge smile.

“But that’s what they’re doing for you. What can I do for you?” He relaxed in his chair and smiled at her.

“I wouldn’t mind a low key get together, here at the house,” she replied. “Dinner was so good, thank you so much for such a nice meal.”

“Consider it done.” Sirius got up from the table and gave her his hand to help her up. “How do you feel about a foot massage?”

“Yes, please,” she chortled with a grin, taking his hand.

Sirius chuckled and helped his very pregnant wife into the family room where he rubbed her feet until she fell asleep, comfortable for the first time that day.

[illegible]

A/N: Thank you for the reviews!

I know this chapter was short. Sorry about that. The next one will be as well.

There is just 1 chapter to go to be followed by a short epilogue.

I Love You So

NC17 - there may be a couple of squicks ahead related to breastfeeding mothers

Waking up for what must have been the tenth time that night, Hermione slowly slid her legs over the side of the bed. Wiggling her toes into her dark, fluffy slippers, she got up and shuffled off to the bathroom. There was a dull ache low in her back and a cramp creeping up the left side of her abdomen. She would never have believed it was possible for one person to feel so uncomfortable.

After concluding her business and washing her hands she crawled back into bed, not bothering to pull on covers or snuggle next to Sirius who was a 'hot' sleeper. He had the sheets and comforter piled on top of him to shield his body from the temperature her pregnancy demanded of their bedroom.

Stirring slightly, she realized she must have disturbed his sleep pattern a little and tried to remain still but it was difficult with the way her body was complaining.

"Hrmmff?" came his sleep roughened rumble as he pushed the cream colored sheets and dark paisley comforter aside so he could squint at her sleepily. "S'alright?"

"Go back to sleep," she whispered, leaning over to kiss his cheek. "I'm fine." I just had to pee. Again.

"Kay."

She smiled at her slumbering beauty of a husband as he nestled back down under his soft fortress of sheets and blankets and at the way his face was always so peaceful and easy when he slept. A little frown touched her lips because she knew that look of peace would disappear when he awoke.

A melancholy had descended upon him over the last week and not just him, Remus too. The reason for that down swing in mood had to do with today, October the thirty first, the day Lily and James had

died. The day their world was ripped apart. Last year at this time there had been no marking of days, they were on the run in Mexico and it had gone by unnoticed. There was no such luxury this year.

Tonks had told her about years past where he and Remus would get filthy drunk at the kitchen table in Grimmauld Place and tell stories about James and Lily until they were crying like babies. She wasn't being calous or unfeeling but in truth she wasn't looking forward to that. Halloween was about muggle kids in adorably cute or whimsically frightening costumes and lavish feasts for Wizard children in the Great Hall at Hogwarts. It wasn't supposed to be about sorrow and regret and 'what if.'

Her hand flew to her side when she felt that little cramp again, this time creeping up her right side. Not quite sharp but not quite dull either, the pain managed to be more than merely uncomfortable. She didn't believe there was any cause for alarm, she'd had cramps before and her due date was still ten days away.

When she woke up a few hours later the spot beside her in bed was vacant, the covers carved out in a pooly shaped crescent that was pushed into the middle of the bed. Smells of bacon and eggs from the kitchen were intruding on her slumber as well as the little cramp she had been playing host to that morning. Before joining Sirius in the kitchen she made a quick stop by the bathroom, again. Slipping her light pink houserobe on over the supersized t-shirt she slept in she left the bedroom, hearing two masculine voices speaking in low tones as she opened the door.

"Morning, boys," greeted Hermione as she waddled into the sunlit kitchen, holding a hand at her back.

"Good morning, Hermione," said Remus, wearing the same look he'd had all week.

Sirius jumped to his feet, pushing against the table which made it lurch slightly and pulled a chair out for her and helped her into it, placing a little kiss on her cheek.

"Good morning, my love," he said before retreating to the cooktop to fix a plate for her.

As he set the plate in front of her, her hand flew to her side again, her face pinched in pain. Placing a hand over hers that was rubbing her side Sirius looked at her with concern. "You feeling ok?"

"Oooff!" she exclaimed, gripping Sirius' other arm with her free hand. "Damn, that one had some kick."

"That one? There were others? Should I floo Molly?" Sirius wasn't sure if it was alarm or excitement in his voice, maybe a bit of both.

"The due date is still ten days away," replied Hermione slowly, squeezing his arm gently in reassurance before releasing him as she let the pain subside.

"Time them," offered Remus calmly as he slowly sipped his coffee, no hint of alarm on his face.

"What?" asked Sirius, his hand still covering the one at her side although she was was trying to inch it away from him.

"Molly said to time them, don't you remember?" Remus remembered when James got like this with Lily, the best help he could offer was to remain steady for the father.

Sirius transfigured his plate from breakfast into a clock, adding a marker to show the time of the first cramp. Instead of relaxing comfortably he stood over her like a one man bomb squad, waiting for her to blow.

"Sit," she commanded.

He sat but his expression didn't change, it was wary and expectant and completely irritating with the way his eyes wouldn't leave her.

"Would you make me some tea?" she asked pleasantly, to give him something to do. She hadn't even had breakfast yet!

She and Remus exchanged a glance across the small kitchen table that spoke volumes; Sirius was going to be a handful today. He laughed lightly and tossed a glance at Sirius who was now consumed with his task, whisking about the kitchen fetching cups and teabags like the fate of the world depended on it. Hermione rolled her eyes because it was to be expected and endearing in a way and just so...Sirius.

When Sirius set the cup of tea down, her favorite teacup, the one that was oversized with the delicate pink blossoms decorating the rim, another contraction hit. Sirius froze, like he was considering a dozen different possible reactions, then made a notation on the clock and looked at Remus.

"Well?"

"Almost ten minutes apart, Molly doesn't want to hear from you until they are five minutes apart." he replied, ever the calm voice of reason for Sirius. Fighting to keep the amusement out of his voice, Remus looked away and into the kitchen to observe Crookshanks consider whether jumping to the counter for a piece of bacon would be worth the trouble it would earn him.

"Oh. Ok, well...we'll just keep an eye on her." Sirius stood over Hermione like a night watchman until her glare convinced him to settle into a chair beside her.

Remus engaged Sirius in light conversation but asked questions that Sirius would have to think about. What were his assignments at work like? What was his most interesting case so far? Had he done any work to the motorbike recently? A whole barrage of questions that required lengthy answers, questions to which he already knew the answers, giving Hermione a chance to eat her breakfast.

When Hermione finished eating Sirius helped her to her feet and into the family room to watch television. Fluffing a few pillows to place at her back, he helped her stretch out, pulling her feet into his lap so he could rub them. Whatever plans he and Remus had that day were scrapped in favor of staying close to Hermione.

As the morning wore into afternoon her contractions became longer and were spaced closer and closer together, it had become clear that this was in fact labor. Sirius was excited and anxious, unable to rein in his excess of energy. He kept hopping up to take care of some last minute urgency, then remembered Hermione and sat back down to rub her feet some more, only to hop back up a few minutes later.

The first of many things he did was to alert Jean, not by using Hermione's cell phone or even sending an owl. He went with instinct and sent a patronus.

"Sirius! You'll scare my mother half to death!"

"Ooops!"

He had been to the nursery and back down a dozen times already. First to get the basinet, then he decided that two were silly and enlarged the one and then changed his mind. Then he changed it back again.

To help, Remus and Hermione made suggestions to which he instantly complied, a light of excitement in his eyes Remus hadn't seen in years. Christmas had come early for one Sirius Black and all melancholic thoughts were left far behind.

When her next contraction hit he was up in the nursery and missed seeing Remus leave by floo to fetch Molly.

"Where'd Moony go?" he asked as he bounced off the last stair and into the family room, practically vibrating with energy.

"To get Molly," she replied with a small smile. His eyes fled to the clock and he made a little sound of surprise and wonder.

"Is it time?" he tittered breathlessly.

To answer, Hermione's water broke.

"Oh, shit!"

The moments after that passed in a blur for Sirius. Molly returned with Remus just after Jean and Herman turned up. Molly and Jean worked together to make things comfortable for Hermione in the bedroom.

Molly brought potions and salves and a whole variety of things to help with her midwifery. Some of the energy was siphoned off in his concern for Hermione and her growing pain. He took his place beside her on the bed and held her hand as she sweated and strained and before it was all over, screamed.

Watching his children come into the world was a humbling experience for Sirius. Squalling and bloody, covered in white mucousy goo, he had never seen anything more beautiful in the world than his son. Molly severed the cord with her wand and then cleaned the babe with a spell made for that purpose while Sirius held him. It was from his hands that Hermione received her first born.

They shared a look that was as old as time, awed by what their love had accomplished. Rasalas was strong, quiet with a shock of soft, brown curls that framed his little head. Rooting noisily at his mother's breast he found the pink nipple with soft, greedy grunting sounds.

Little Rasalas didn't have long to enjoy the contentment he found before his twin stole his mother's breath with a powerful contraction and he was pulled away and handed to his grandmother. Adhara was the smaller of the two and made quick use of the path blazed by her brother.

As different as the noon day sun is from the full moon, Adhara was loud and fussy, her silky black hair a match with her father's. The moment she stepped into the room she required its full attention.

Swaddled in soft receiving blankets after being thoroughly cleaned by Molly, little Adhara complained noisily until Sirius spoke to his daughter.

"Hey you, pipe down." His deep baritone fascinated her, capturing her attention. With features that were familiar to him he gazed down at the tiny baby girl and realized that his heart would never again be his own.

"Can I have a look," asked Hermione, torn between wanting to watch Sirius fall for his daughter and wanting to hold the newborn herself.

"Oh, sorry," said Sirius, a little sheepishly, carefully handing the little girl over and helping her get settled on a nipple.

Adhara fussed even as she nursed while Sirius helped Rasalas get settled on the other side. The baby girl didn't stop whining, releasing noises of discontent between soft sucking sounds, until Sirius sang quietly to the new mother and her twin babies.

"Harry Belafonte?" whispered Hermione.

Sirius just smiled softly at her and kept singing 'And I Love You So.' His baritone caressed the words as his fathomless grey eyes held hers in tenderness and gratitude for all she had given him. Her heart welled up and spilled over as tears gathered in her eyes. Not since Christmas in her fifth year had she heard his rich singing voice, now thickened with emotion and the truth that the lyrics held for him.

Whatever this day might have meant for him in years past, it was now the day his son and daughter were born, the happiest day of his entire existence, the day he finally got his true family.

-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-

"Why you little-" laughed Sirius as a stream of pale yellow erupted from the diaper he was attempting to change.

Hermione looked over at him and giggled, although quite a good baby, Rasalas seemed possessed of a sense of humor. Adhara struggled in her mother's arms upon hearing her father's voice, straining her wobbly head to try and catch a glimpse of him.

"Your girlfriend is looking for you," said Hermione wryly, rocking in the chair Sirius bought her the day after the twins were born.

Sirius leaned back off the couch so she could look at him. "Hello, beautiful."

"What is it with you and girls?" teased Hermione.

"Jealous?" he joked back.

"No, but then I know something you seemed to have overlooked," she returned coyly.

"Hmm...what's that?" he asked as he victoriously attached a new diaper to his son.

"Our period of...waiting, is over," she replied, blushing a little.

"Waiting?" he asked confused. "Oh...waiting? That period of waiting?"

"Uh, huh. That one." Adhara settled back down to nursing while her father looked her mother over with renewed interest.

"So..." said Sirius, hoisting his son up in his arms with a radiant smile, stepping toward Hermione with a slight swagger. "All ready to make a new set, are we?"

"Ha!" replied Hermione. "Lets just enjoy these two shall we?"

"Still," he said, moving her blouse aside so he could settle Rasalas to nurse on the other side, grazing his finger over a nipple, very much on purpose. "No harm in keeping our form."

"That is just so very wrong," said Hermione with a little glare, unable to control her response to him. It had just been so long...

"Hey, don't blame me if-"

"Don't you dare say it!" she said scandalized. "I can't even believe you thought it!"

Sirius chuckled at himself, it was rather wrong of him.

Getting a beer for himself and a glass of pumpkin juice for her, he returned to the family room, the odd gleam still present in his eyes. Taking a seat and then singing in that deep crooner's voice of his,

Sirius tabled his libido to enjoy his family. Hermione closed her eyes and just soaked up his happiness. Trading his heartfelt serenade from a few weeks ago for a traditional wizard lullaby, he watched his babies mouths work against their mother's breast, slowing imperceptibly until they were only latched on for comfort.

"Shhh..." Sirius startled her by taking one sleeping baby out of her arms and then the other, settling them side by side in the enlarged basinet.

"C,mon," he whispered, taking her by the hand and leading her into the bedroom.

Behaving far more gentlemanly than he felt, gently wrapping an arm around her waist and cradling her head, he kissed her properly like he hadn't done in several weeks.

"God, I've missed you," he whispered against her mouth.

"Pleeeeeease," she whimpered in response, tearing at his clothes in effort to get him naked.

Pulling at her clothes with just as much need Sirius whispered, "You know we should probably take it easy at first."

"To hell with that," returned Hermione, wrapping her fingers around his cock, squeezing and pulling him to a full erection without mercy even as he was touching her gingerly, like he was afraid she might be breakable.

Sirius growled low in his chest and pushed her, making her fall back against the bed. Running his hands up her legs, starting at her ankles, smoothing up her calves and scratching lightly along the outside of her thighs, he slowly moved his body over hers, licking, kissing and sucking at her flesh as he went.

Pausing as he moved over her dampening core to breath in her heady scent but not stopping to touch, he touched his lips against her belly, nipping at her with his teeth and tickling her sides with his fingers.

"It's been so long, Sirius," she whined, lifting her hips to press her body against his, feeling his erection make contact with her thigh.

"Which is exactly why I'm going to take this easy," he answered, the strain of his self restraint evident in his voice.

Pushing his hands up her body, marveling at how smooth her skin felt, how delightful it was to touch her body again, letting out a soft moan when he reached her breasts. Kneading them softly with his fingers a little milk excreted out onto her nipples. He grinned wolfishly and dipped his head to taste, suckling her nipple with his hot mouth making her gasp and giggle at his antics.

"I can't believe you did that," she panted when he released her nipple with a wet smack.

"Sweeter than I expected," he admitted, leaning down to nibble against her neck. Nipping and licking her soft skin, enjoying the sounds of her pleasure, he traced a slow, hot trail to her mouth. Rolling onto his back while keeping her in place, so that now she was over him, he let himself get lost in a fiery kiss that was going somewhere, finally!

Relaxing into the bed, he let himself enjoy her exploration. Her lips left his mouth to bite and suck along his neck, one hand wrapped in his hair, the other exploring his body. She hadn't felt the firmness of his muscles under skin like this in weeks, tracing gently along his tattoos, teasing his nipples and then feeling the hard ripple of his abdomen under her fingers.

Sirius growled contentedly, her attention was delightful and welcome and definitely testing his will to let this reunion of flesh go gently. He worried about hurting her but that was almost entirely drowned out when her soft fingers wrapped around his length and squeezed.

Opening his eyes, he looked down at her, looking back at him with a determination in her eyes, that and lust. Waiting for him to look at her, she dipped her head, never breaking eye contact and sucked him into her mouth. His heart rate sped up instantly, the euphoric pleasure of

her mouth combined with a whore's look in her eye on that innocent face was just too much.

She didn't want him to be gentle and was determined to snap the self control he had never before displayed. She wanted her husband, the ravisher, the man who made her cry out to the heaven's and sing his name in that low throaty voice only he could bring out of her.

Moving so swiftly that it was a blur, Hermione found herself tossed back against the bed with Sirius leaning over her, the grey of his eyes pushed to the outer edges, his pupils glowing like black fire. Hermione arched her body into his, a physical plea to make good on his lust, to fuck her like he meant it.

"You won't hurt me, I need this, need you...please, Sirius...fuck me!" The last of his resolve disintegrated when the word 'fuck' passed her lips. Thrusting into her harder than he would have preferred, his hardened cock slipped into her velvet warmth.

"God, yes," she moaned, arcing her hips to meet his thrust.

"Fuck!" he breathed, hot and damp against her neck. "So fucking good, so tight!"

Slipping back and then pushing in once again, he set a hard pace as her legs wrapped around him, her hands pulling his head to her mouth so she could kiss him as he fucked her.

It was like coming home but not quite as wholesome, weeks of need pushed their way to the fore and neither could remember why they were supposed to take it easy. Slick with sweat, their bodies slid against one another, pelvises meeting in hard arcing thrusts, the friction and rough action forcing the pleasurable frustration that only drove them harder to their goal.

"Harder, Sirius!" she begged.

Maddened with lust and a need to come stronger than he could ever remember, he lifted her legs up to penetrate more deeply and then leaned in, pushing her knees to her chest. Slamming into her body

with power fueled by the adrenaline he was pumping, he fucked her with a ferocity he didn't remember possessing before this very hour. Never before had she felt so much like his, his wife, his lover, his cunt.

His name passed her lips, a mantra of praise for how good he felt, how close she was. He didn't need her to tell him that, he could feel her cunt twitching, reaching his hand around her thigh, his fingers found her clit and twisted.

"Come for me, baby!"

Sweeping out across her body like liquid fire, her orgasm crashed against her body like a physical blow. She cried out his name in ecstasy, her pussy pulsing and squeezing him, sucking him in so deep, so hard he was helpless to do more than rock against her and come, harder than he ever had before. Her name passed his lips in a pained roar as he spilled himself deep inside her, every pulse of hers emptying him completely until he had nothing left.

Gently setting her legs back down on the bed, he collapsed on top of her, breathing heavily as his heart tried to regain control. Sweaty and damp, hair clinging to their faces they smiled at each other and shared a soft kiss. Rolling to the side, he slipped out of her, his limp cock entirely spent.

Rolling them away from the wet messy evidence of their union, they curled around each other as close as they could get. He listened to her breathing slow, felt her heart returning to a normal rhythm and just thanked whatever gods there were for his wife, mother of his children, his Hermione.

Never once, in his wildest imaginings did he ever think he would be this happy, this content.

"I love you, Hermione."

"I love you more," she returned playfully.

Before he could answer and continue their 'I love you the most' game, came the loud squall of baby girl who just realized the universe

wasn't paying her its due. Sirius kissed Hermione on the cheek and got out of bed, humming the tune to 'And I Love You So' as he went.

the end

Epilogue to follow

[illegible]

A/N: Thank you for the reviews!

So, this is it, this is all there is. There will be a brief epilogue and then I am all done. Kinda sad, really.

The epilogue is set a few years down the road, I want to let you meet the kids when they are a little older.

There will not be a sequel, no stories about the kids or anything like that. I may write one shots from time to time but not for quite awhile. Definitely nothing other than whimsy hitting me.

Life Goes On

Harry walked into the family room with Sirius at his back and paused, not quite able to believe his eyes. At the back of the family room, close to the stairs, sat a doll house so large it was comical. The house opened into two parts, hinged on one side so that its interior could be accessed and sitting in between both halves was a beautiful, black haired girl with delicate features dressed in a cornflower gown. She turned her piercing, slate blue eyes on Harry, eyes that were a variation on her father's grey and just as compelling, her face breaking into a delighted smile. It was still startling to him just how much she resembled Sirius, only softened with her child's features.

“Uncle Harry!” she cried, leaping to her long legs, a bit ungainly with a soft blush to show her consciousness of it. He picked her up and spun her around, laughing and smiling.

“How’s my best girl?” asked Harry, setting her down lightly.

“Look Uncle Harry! Look what daddy got me!” she said tugging him by the arm, leading him into the family room to show off her prize.

Harry looked up as he neared the doll house and smiled at Hermione. Sitting snuggled next to her, peering over her elbow as she read was a curly-headed, brown haired child with a solemn expression. They both turned their faces to him and smiled. Liquid brown and caramel colored eyes met green over the coffee table.

“Hello, Uncle Harry,” said the serious young man, but with the tender voice of a young boy. With Sirius’ face, his mane of soft brown curls and caramel eyes he looked every inch the young lion for which he had been named.

“Hello, Ras,” replied Harry. “How are you?”

“Uncle Harry,” said the dark haired girl, tugging on his hand, irritated that his attention had been diverted. Suddenly, there was nothing Harry wanted more than to play with dolls. His focus left Hermione

and Rasalas completely as he settled himself between the two halves of the enormous doll house.

“Adhara Lily Black! Cut that out this instant!” demanded Hermione, setting the book aside and sitting on the edge of the couch.

“Mummy said not to, Dar,” added the sober Rasalas, looking at his sister imperiously. “Everyone knows now.” She stuck a tiny pink tongue out at him. He stuck one back at her.

“Knows what?” asked Harry confused, his strange desire to play with dolls suddenly gone, he had after all, come over to give flying lessons as promised. Sirius walked over and gave him a hand up which he took gratefully.

They settled onto a couch together while Adhara, all elbows and knees, climbed up like an uncoordinated puppy to sit between them. She let out a tiny huff as her father ignored her independence and gathered her onto his lap. He kissed the top of her head and smiled at his wife. “Why don’t you tell Harry about our recent discovery.”

“Adhara,” said Hermione, with a glance at her daughter, “has the rare ability to implant suggestions into the minds of others.”

Harry’s mouth dropped open. “You’re joking! How...how did you figure that out?”

“Albus was over a couple of days ago. He was entertaining the kids during his visit, making things appear and disappear for them, when he tried to leave he felt grubby fingers pulling on his mind,” replied Sirius, glancing unconsciously at the doll house. “Dar was trying to make him stay.” Harry heard the lanky child in his godfather’s lap grumble something unintelligible in her small voice.

“Hence gigantic doll houses when there isn’t any room for one, much less the excuse of a birthday or Christmas,” added Hermione irritably.

"Go easy on her," defended Sirius, stroking his daughter's silky black hair with his large hand. "She's only six."

Hermione smiled at the pair and then gave Sirius a patronizing look. Since the day of her birth Adhara had wrapped her father around her little finger. "I know, Sirius," she said gently and smiled at her daughter.

"The thing I'm most worried about is that she is going to end up in Slytherin," joked Sirius. Adhara turned her bright face toward her father with a questioning look, not fully certain what 'Slytherin' meant but pleased he was talking about her.

"That's not what I'm worried about," interjected Hermione.

"Really?" said Sirius surprised. "Pray, tell what you are worried about."

"Boys," said Hermione simply.

Sirius gave Hermione a blank look as he had conveniently overlooked the obvious, the implication dawned on him slowly as indicated by his tightening hold on his daughter. Unconsciously he began to shake his head before saying, "No. No boys."

Harry chuckled quietly while Hermione tutted, wondering to herself how difficult Hogwarts would be on her husband, only a few short years away.

"So, Harry, did you bring your broom?" asked Hermione, leaving Sirius, no doubt, to his thoughts regarding the feasibility of a chastity belt. She smiled at the two small heads that looked swiftly at her and then eagerly at Harry.

"Yeah," he answered. "That's what I'm here for, right? It's in the entryway." He was immediately mobbed by two excited six year olds.

"Daddy bought us our brooms the other day," sang Adhara excitedly, hopping up and down with childish abandon.

"Mummy wouldn't let us touch them though," added Rasalas with uncharacteristic grumpiness.

"Too right, she was at that," said Harry, supporting his friend. "It's important to learn to fly properly."

Adhara grabbed Rasalas' hand in her excitement and squealed, "We're going to learn to fly!"

"Do be careful," said Hermione nervously to Harry. "You how I feel about flying. Honestly, I don't know how Sirius talked me into this."

Sirius winked at her and replied, "I'll remind you later."

"Right, well, lets get to it," said Harry with a slight bit of embarrassment, grateful to see that the context of the conversation had sailed neatly over the children's heads.

Or so he hoped.

"Daddy always talks Mummy into the fun stuff," said Rasalas confidently.

"I don't know how," added Adhara. "First she said no but the next day she fine with it."

"Daddy knows Mummy magic," whispered Rasalas to Adhara who nodded sagely, her adoring gaze falling on her father, the conquering hero.

"Accio Broom," cried Harry, pointedly ignoring Hermione's flush and Sirius' wide grin, eager to get on with the lesson so he didn't have to suffer anymore of the children's observations.

"I'll just go get their brooms," said Hermione, taking the muggle approach to give her some relief.

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"I've got something to tell you," said Hermione, as she and Sirius watched Harry patiently teach their children the basics of broom handling.

"Hmmm, what's that," murmured Sirius, as he watched all three of his children interact. The son of James would always be a son to him and it made his heart swell to know they all three adored each other.

"I'm taking a brief hiatus as President," she replied softly. "And at the next F.L.E.M. meeting I'm asking for a vote so that someone can fill my shoes as Chair Witch for a few months."

Turning away from the flying lesson, he gave her his full attention. "Why? Are you alright?"

Taking his hand in hers she placed it over her belly. "Never better."

The hand at her belly reminded him of their first ever conversation about children, as it was intended to. Understanding flooded his face as he broke out in a huge childish grin. "Really?"

"Definitely. I'm late," she said with special emphasis on the last word, "so I ran to the market this morning and got one of those muggle pregnancy tests."

Lifting her up he swung her around, whooping gleefully before falling into one of the metal patio chairs, settling his giggling, blushing bride securely in his lap. From out in the yard their children could be heard whispering conspiratorially to one another as the flying lesson halted to view the affectionate couple who were obviously thrilled about something.

"That's interesting," observed Harry.

"Daddy's using his Mummy magic again," whispered Adhara. "Wonder what it is?"

"I don't know," answered Rasalas. "But I'll bet its going to be fun!"

Thank you to everyone who made special contributions to the story, your ideas were wonderful and kept my imagination buzzing!